

PUBLIC

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29 September 2000

UA 305/00 Fear for safety

SOLOMON ISLANDS Eric Rove (Solomon Airlines pilot)

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Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of a pilot who has been kidnapped by an armed political group involved in the Solomon Islands' ongoing ethnic conflict.

Captain Eric Rove, a pilot from Roviana Lagoon in the Western Province, was kidnapped by the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) after he landed at Babanakira, on the remote southwestern coast of Guadalcanal island. In a radio message on 16 September, he said that the GRA was demanding the equivalent of US\$400,000 for his release and for the return of his Solomon Airlines plane.

The Brotherhood of the Church of Melanesia have been trying to facilitate negotiations between the government and the kidnapers for Eric Rove's release. However, despite promising to release him unharmed, the GRA continues to hold him captive. The GRA has reportedly said that it is holding him and his plane because the government has been too slow in fulfilling compensation promises it made to opposition groups during peace talks.

The GRA leader who kidnapped Eric Rove is believed to be responsible for torturing and killing two civilians kidnapped from Malaita island in June.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Eric Rove's kidnapers identify themselves as the GRA, indicating that they have broken with the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM), an armed political group they have been supporting throughout the two-year ethnic conflict over Guadalcanal land and development rights.

The armed conflict, which was initiated by the IFM, has driven an estimated 20,000 Malaitan settlers away from Guadalcanal island since 1998. Scores of Malaitans were killed or injured during IFM raids on civilian villages in 1999, and hundreds have lost their homes (see *Solomon Islands: A forgotten conflict*, ASA 43/05/00, 7 September 2000).

While the IFM has sought participation in peace talks, the GRA are believed to be responsible for continued atrocities. Since a June coup led to a change of government, reports of kidnappings, torture and killings of civilians have increased in Guadalcanal on both sides of the ethnic conflict.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned at violations of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which forbids governments and armed opposition groups alike to torture or deliberately kill civilians taking no part in hostilities, to harm those who are wounded, captured or seeking to surrender, or to take hostages.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

**To the commanders of the IFM:**

- expressing concern that Eric Rove's life is at risk after he has been kidnapped by an armed political group believed to be responsible for torturing and killing other civilians;
- urging the IFM leadership to use its influence in assisting negotiations for his release;
- appealing to the IFM leadership to publicly condemn abductions, torture and killings of civilians by any group operating under the IFM banner.

**To the Prime Minister:**

- expressing concern that Eric Rove's life is at risk after he has been kidnapped by an armed political group believed to be responsible for torturing and killing other civilians;
- urging the government to explore all possible avenues to negotiate his release and to ensure full support for the Melanesian Brotherhood negotiators;
- appealing to the government to issue a clear statement condemning any violence or intimidation against civilians.

**APPEALS TO:**

Isatabu Freedom Movement Command  
c/- The Secretary,  
Ceasefire Monitoring Council  
PO Box G404  
Honiara  
Solomon Islands (Southwest Pacific)  
**Fax: + 677 24036**  
**Salutation: Dear Commander**

The Hon. Mannaseh Sogavare MP  
Prime Minister  
Office of the Prime Minister  
PO Box G1  
Honiara,  
Solomon Islands (South Pacific)  
**Telegrams: Prime Minister, Solomon Islands**  
**Fax: + 677 25470**  
**Salutation: Dear Prime Minister**

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of the Solomon Islands accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 November.