

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 43/06/00

29 September 2000

UA 305/00

Fear for safety

SOLOMON ISLANDS Eric Rove (Solomon Airlines pilot)

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 kidnappers 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 kidnappers identify themselves as the GRA, indicating that they have broken (IFM), an armed political group they have been supporting throughout the two-year ethnic land and development rights.

The armed conflict, which was initiated by the IFM, has driven an estimated 20,000 Malaitans 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 lives. (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 resistant to any change of government, reports of kidnappings, torture and killings of civilians have

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 a 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.

To the Prime Minister:

- expressing concern that Eric Rove's life is at risk after he has been kidnapped by and killing other civilians;
- urging the government to explore all possible avenues to negotiate his release and negotiators;
- appealing to the government to issue a clear statement condemning any violence or :

APPEALS TO:

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

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