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Fear for safety

13 September 2000

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Matthew Wale

Julian Treadaway, academic

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Gunmen have threatened and attacked prominent citizens who have called for civil society to be allowed to play a role in the peace process now underway in the Solomon Islands' two-year ethnic conflict, and who have publicly opposed a blanket amnesty for those involved in the conflict, which has left more than 100 people dead.

Peace talks have been underway on and off for the past year between the government and the rival ethnic armed groups involved in the conflict, including the paramilitary Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), which is supported by sections of the police. The MEF led a coup in June 2000, forcing the Prime Minister to resign and forcing the parliament to form a new government. The new Prime Minister promised to consider an amnesty for the armed groups involved in the conflict, as an incentive for a cease-fire.

So far civil society groups have largely been excluded from the peace negotiations. In August the Solomon Islands Christian Association organised a "National Peace Conference", attended by civil society organisations, which called for fundamental human rights to be respected, and warned against a blanket amnesty, in a communiqué issued on 29 August.

The leader of the MEF expressed his "unhappiness" with the communiqué in a letter to the chairman of the Christian Association. Since then MEF gunmen are believed to have attacked or threatened several of those who took part.

One of the more outspoken participants in the conference, who called for civil society to be given an active role in the peace talks, was Matthew Wale, a manager from Malaita island. His family was attacked at his home by gunmen, believed to be MEF members, on the night of 8 September. His cousin was severely beaten, and the gunmen stole valuables, in an apparent punishment attack for Matthew Wale's role in the conference.

Following the conference, MEF members have threatened the Director of the University of the South Pacific Centre, Julian Treadaway, for his plans to hold a public forum to discuss the proposed amnesty. MEF gunmen have also reportedly threatened to burn down the university centre should the planned public forum go ahead.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

All sides to the ethnic conflict in the Solomons have been responsible for human rights abuses and violations, and so far there has been almost complete impunity for all those responsible. Amnesty International is particularly concerned at violations of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which forbids governments and armed 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.

A climate of fear and lawlessness prevails in and around Honiara. Yesterday MEF members reportedly fired shots outside the Ministry of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation, and threatened ministry staff.

Amnesty International has explained its opposition to any blanket amnesty for those responsible for human rights violations or abuses, and has urged that any amnesty should exclude criminal offences which would constitute human rights violations or

abuses. (See Amnesty International report, *Solomon Islands: A forgotten conflict*, 7 September 2000, ASA 43/05/00)

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

**To the Malaita Eagle Force Command:**

- expressing concern for the safety of Matthew Wale, Julian Treadaway and other members of civil society attempting to engage in the peace process in the Solomon Islands, who are reportedly under threat from factions of the Malaita Eagle Force;
- urging the MEF leadership to issue a clear statement condemning any violence or intimidation against civilians;
- appealing to the MEF to immediately halt attacks on people taking no direct part in hostilities, by any forces under their control.

**To the Prime Minister:**

- expressing concern at threats made by alleged members of the Malaita Eagle Force against members of civil society involved in peace initiatives;
- urging the government to publicly condemn any violence and intimidation against civilians, and asking them to do everything within their power to provide protection from such attacks.

**APPEALS TO:**

Malaita Eagle Force Command  
Andrew Nori  
Bridge Lawyers, Barristers & Solicitors  
PO Box 821  
Honiara  
Solomon Islands (Southwest Pacific)  
**Fax: + 677 20195**  
**Salutation: Dear Mr Nori**

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 26088/25470**  
**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 25 October 2000.