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TONGA: RELEASED PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE DETAINED AGAIN

Amnesty International is alarmed about apparent Tongan Government attempts to intimidate journalists and pro-democracy politicians following the arrest today by Tongan police of two politicians and a journalist believed to be held on sedition charges.

“For the third time this year journalists and politicians have been detained in Tonga as a result of peacefully criticising the government,” Amnesty International said today.

“Only last month we welcomed the early release from prison of two of those arrested today whom we considered prisoners of conscience -- now it appears they are facing imprisonment again for similar activities but under different legislation.”

The two politicians, 'Akilisi Pohiva and Tesina Fuko, are reportedly still being held in police cells in Nuku'alofa while deputy editor of the *Times of Tonga*, Filokalafi 'Akau'ola, has been released. They are believed to face sedition charges related to newspaper articles calling for greater democracy.

In Tonga, a minority of eight members of parliament are elected by the general population while another 21 seats are held by cabinet ministers, appointed by King Taufa 'Ahau Tupou IV, and by Nobles, traditional representatives of the King in the villages.

'Akilisi Pohiva is a pro-democracy leader and Tesina Fuko is the representative of the Ha'apai group of islands in the northeast of Tonga. Filokalafi 'Akau'ola had already been arrested with two other pro-democracy supporters in January for inciting Police Minister Clive Edwards to anger.

'Akilisi Pohiva and Filokalafi 'Akau'ola were imprisoned on 19 September by the Legislative Assembly for contempt of Parliament but were released after three weeks by the Supreme Court which ruled their jailing violated the Constitution and the Rules of the House. They had been imprisoned together with the editor of the *Times of Tonga*, Kalafi Moala, following the publication in the newspaper of a motion criticising the Minister of Justice.

Their imprisonment was based on the claim that the motion had not been formally submitted before publication on 4 September. But the Secretary of the Peoples' Representatives group of parliamentarians had reportedly handed in the motion at the office of Parliament 11 days before it was published.

“Tonga cannot escape international scrutiny of its human rights record by virtue of its size and isolation,” Amnesty International said.

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