

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Press Release of the Greek Section

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Greece: Hundreds of appeals from all over the world to the Prime Minister for the conscientious objectors

On the occasion of Lazaros Petromelidis' trial on 4 of May at the Appeal Military Court of Athens, Amnesty International delivers to the Greek Prime Minister more than 600 appeals from all over the world of the campaign 'Greece: "Cease fire" on conscientious objectors' (www.amnesty.org.gr/actnow/gre20050331.htm)

More than 600 persons from more than 30 countries from all over the world are writing to Mr. Kostas Karamanlis to express their deepest concern about the continuing prosecutions of conscientious objectors to military service in Greece, and especially about the multiple prosecutions of conscientious objectors Lazaros Petromelidis and Giorgos Monastiriotis, who have been repeatedly sentenced by Military Courts to heavy prison sentences for their conscientious objection.

All these people urge Mr. Kostas Karamanlis to respect their fundamental human right to conscientious objection and put an immediate end to their prosecutions. They ask the Greek Prime Minister to bring the provisions of the alternative civilian service in line with European and internationally recognized standards and recommendations (of the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations) as well as in line with the recommendations of the Greek Ombudsman and the Greek National Commission for Human Rights.

Lazaros Petromelidis, 44, President of the Association of Greek Conscientious Objectors, objected to military service on the grounds of conscience in 1992 and has been repeatedly prosecuted and convicted since then. He refused to do the alternative service he was offered in 1998, as it was of an extremely punitive duration -- in his case, seven and a half times longer than the military service he would otherwise have had to perform (he would serve 4 months and buy off the rest 8 months of the 12-month military service while he should serve a 30-month alternative civilian service with no right to buy off some part of it). His conscientious objector status was then revoked. Since then, he has been regularly receiving call-up papers to serve in the military and has been repeatedly charged with insubordination because of his refusal, as a conscientious objector, to perform military service. He was previously imprisoned in May 1998, April 1999 and September 2002.

In June 2003, the Appeal Military Court of Athens sentenced him to 20 months' imprisonment suspended for three years for insubordination. Upon his most recent sentence by the Naval Court of Piraeus in absentia to 30 months' imprisonment for insubordination in December 2004, the previous suspension of the sentence was lifted, meaning that he will have to serve a total prison sentence of 50 months once he is arrested. Even under the new law 3421/2005, which gave him the option to apply again for alternative civilian service, he should serve a punitive and discriminatory alternative civilian service of 17 months while if he was not a conscientious objector he would serve a 9-month military service of which he could buy off 7,5 months and actually serve only 1,5 month.

Lazaros Petromelidis is expecting his appeal hearing for the conviction of December 2004 on 4 May 2006 at the Appeal Military Court of Athens. If Lazaros Petromelidis is imprisoned, Amnesty International will consider him to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned for his conscientious objection and will call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Background

Greek conscientious objectors are regularly called up to military service, and every time they refuse to serve in the army a new prosecution is brought against them on grounds of insubordination, disobedience or desertion. This practice violates Article 14, paragraph 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that: "*No one shall be liable to be tried or punished again for an offence for which he has been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with the law and penal procedure of each country.*"

In March 2005, the United Nations Human Rights Committee called on Greece to improve the situation of conscientious objectors noting that: "*The Committee is concerned that the length of alternative service for conscientious objectors is much longer than military service, and that the assessment of applications for such service is solely under the control of the Ministry of Defence. The State party should ensure that the length of service alternative to military service does not have a punitive character, and should consider placing the assessment of applications for conscientious objector status under the control of civilian authorities.*"