

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: EUR 25/003/2008 (Public)

Date: 20 June 2008

Greece: Lazaros Petromelidis repeatedly convicted for his beliefs



Lazaros Petromelidis (45) has been repeatedly sentenced by military courts for his conscientious objection to military service and is again in danger of arrest and imprisonment.

© Amnesty International

Amnesty International, the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection and War Resisters' International have issued a joint appeal regarding the case of conscientious objector Lazaros Petromelidis.

Lazaros Petromelidis' case has a long history of 16 years, full of prosecutions and convictions. He was first prosecuted after he declared his conscientious objection in March 1992, at a time when Greece did not recognize the right to conscientious objection. In 1998 he refused to do the alternative service he was offered, 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. 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 serve in the army. He has been imprisoned three times, in May 1998, April 1999 and September 2002 and has been banned from travelling abroad.

On 20 May 2008, Lazaros Petromelidis was again sentenced in absentia to three years' imprisonment without suspension on two charges of insubordination by the Naval Court of Piraeus. This means that after this trial, his 15th one, there is again an arrest warrant for Lazaros Petromelidis, and he is in imminent danger of imprisonment for his beliefs. At 45, Lazaros Petromelidis is in his last conscription year but may be called up again at any time before 31 December 2008.

Every time Lazaros Petromelidis refuses to serve in the army a new prosecution is brought against him. His repeated punishment for the same offence contravenes 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.*" Repeated punishments of conscientious objectors have been cited by the Human Rights Committee as particular instances of violation of Article 14 (General Comment No. 32).

The right to conscientious objection is a legitimate exercise of the fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 18), the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Article 9) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 10).

Please write, calling on the authorities to stop immediately the prosecutions against Lazaros Petromelidis and to recognize the right to conscientious objection according to international standards and recommendations.

Send appeals to:
Kostas Karamanlis
Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic
Megaron Maximou
19 Herodou Atticou Avenue
106 74 Athens, Greece
Fax: +30 210 671 5799



Public Document

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK

www.amnesty.org