



European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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P R E S S R E L E A S E

World War I: A century on, we honour the conscientious objectors and we urge Europe to do more for peace and refugees

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"On the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War, EBCO honours the conscientious objectors who refused to fight then, expresses its solidarity to the conscientious objectors who refuse to fight today, and calls to respect all over the world the peaceable commitment of people for the end of wars, armed conflicts and violence", Friedhelm Schneider, EBCO's President stated today.

During the World War I, 1914-1918 it is estimated that more than nine million troops were killed, and, as many as 10 million civilians. Some 21 million soldiers were wounded, and unprecedented millions of people became homeless refugees. Thousands of men refused to fight for a variety of reasons, although the primary reasons were religious (e.g. Quakers) and moral (a disinclination to harm one's fellow man). Only in Britain, some 16.000 men were officially recorded in as conscientious objectors during this 'Great War'. Some of them were sentenced to death, some were made to take on medical roles and other 'work of national importance' on the roads and land, while around 7.000 served in non-combatant roles, including on the front line as medics. At least 6.000 conscientious objectors saw out the war – and beyond – in jail, and 73 died during the war in the UK, mainly as a result of their treatment. The USA, Canada and Denmark also introduced some conscientious objection recognition during World War I.

"Unfortunately armed conflicts are still happening today, leading to new bloodsheds and war crimes, opening more vicious circles of endless violence, killings and injuries, religious and racial hate, militarism and nationalism, poverty and environmental destruction. Current armed conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria and Sudan are just some examples. We urge Europe to do more to promote peace, prevent war crimes such as killing civilians and using children soldiers, and protect refugees seeking asylum in Europe. Words are not enough, immediate action is required", Friedhelm Schneider, EBCO's President added.

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EBCO was founded in Brussels in 1979 as an umbrella structure for national associations of conscientious objectors in the European countries to promote the right to conscientious objection to preparations for, and participation in, war and any other type of military activity as a fundamental human right. It enjoys participatory status with the Council of Europe since 1998 and is a member of its Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations since 2005. It provides expertise and legal opinions on behalf of the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe. It is involved in drawing up the annual report of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Parliament on the application by the Member States of its resolutions on conscientious objection and civilian service, as determined in the "Bandrés Molet & Bindi Resolution" of 1994. It is a full member of the European Youth Forum since 1995.