



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

EBCO: Finland must urgently comply with the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee

9 April 2021

On April the 1st the United Nations Human Rights Committee adopted its concluding observations on Finland's seventh periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on Civil and Political Rights. Committees' criticism towards the situation of conscientious objectors has further increased compared to previous conclusions issued in 2013.

The [European Bureau for Conscientious Objection](http://www.ebco-beoc.org) (EBCO) echoes the demands of its member organisation in Finland, the Union of Conscientious Objectors (AKL), requiring that the conclusions of the UN Human Rights Committee must be taken seriously into account when preparing legislation on non-military service, e.g. in the on-going work of the Parliamentary Committee to Develop General Conscription.

"EBCO expresses its satisfaction about the concluding observations of the UN Human Rights Committee. EBCO urges the Finish government to stop prosecuting and imprisoning conscientious objectors, and amend the civilian service which is still extremely punitive and discriminatory", EBCO's President Alexia Tsouni stated today.

On its concluding observations, the UN Human Rights Committee:

- expresses its concern that Finland has removed the exemption from military and civilian service accorded to Jehovah's Witnesses, in contrast to the Committee's previous recommendations to extend such exemption to other groups of conscientious objectors. It recommends that Finland should halt all prosecutions of individuals who refuse to perform military service on grounds of conscience and release those who are currently serving related prison sentences.
- notes with concern that the regular duration of alternative non-military service amounts to the longest period of military service and that, while such alternative service is under the direction of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, military personnel still take part in relevant working groups and committees determining the nature and duration of alternative service. It calls on Finland to ensure that alternatives to military service are not punitive or discriminatory in terms of their nature or duration and remain of a civilian nature, outside military command;

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.

- is also concerned about the insufficient dissemination of information about the right to conscientious objection and alternatives to military service and recommends Finland to intensify its efforts to raise awareness among the public about the right to conscientious objection and the availability of alternatives to military service.

NOTES:

Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee on the seventh periodic report of Finland, 1 April 2021:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/FIN/CCPR_C_FIN_CO_7_44648_E.pdf

The original documents related to the 131st session of the UN Human Rights Committee and the review of Finland, including the submissions made by civil society, such as the AKL's and IFOR's ones:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2463&Lang=en

Press release of the Finish Union of Conscientious Objectors (AKL), 1 April 2021: "Human Rights Committee: Finland must release the imprisoned conscientious objectors and fix the problems of non-military service":

<http://akl-web.fi/fi/posts/ykn-ihmisoikeuskomitea-suomen-vapautettava-totaalit-ja-korjattava-siviilipalveluksen-ongelmat>

EBCO report on conscientious objection to military service in Europe 2020:

[https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/attachments/2021-02-15-EBCO Annual Report 2020.pdf](https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/attachments/2021-02-15-EBCO%20Annual%20Report%202020.pdf)

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