



European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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

EBCO on mission in Kyiv and on delivery of petition to EU in Brussels in support of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian conscientious objectors

Brussels, 23 May 2023

Today, May 23rd, in Brussels, Belgium, **Sam Biesemans, EBCO Vice-President delivered a letter to EU President Charles Michel together with almost 50.000 signatures of the international [#ObjectWarCampaign appeal to the European Parliament and petition](#) to uphold the right to asylum to conscientious objectors and deserters from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine by hosting states, jointly launched by [Connection e.V.](#), the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection - [EBCO](#), the International Fellowship of Reconciliation - [IFOR](#), and War Resisters' International - [WRI](#).**

"EBCO strongly condemns the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and calls on all soldiers not to participate in hostilities and on all recruits to refuse military service. EBCO denounces all the cases of forced and even violent recruitment to the armies of both sides, as well as all the cases of persecution of conscientious objectors, deserters and non-violent anti-war protestors. EBCO urges EU to work for peace, invest in diplomacy and negotiations, call for human rights protection and grant asylum and visas to those who object the war", Sam Biesemans stated today.

Meanwhile, **EBCO delegate Derek Brett travelled from Switzerland to Ukraine to attend, as international observer, two court hearings of Ukrainian conscientious objectors at the Supreme Court of Ukraine in Kyiv this week.**

The first one was on May 22nd, about the case of **Andrii Vyshnevetsky**, a Christian conscientious objector and member of the [Ukrainian Pacifist Movement](#), who is held at frontline unit of the Armed Forces of Ukraine against the dictates of his own conscience. Andrii Vyshnevetsky filed a lawsuit against the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky regarding the establishment of the procedure for discharge from military service on the basis of conscientious objection. The Supreme Court allowed the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement to join the case as a third party who does not make independent claims regarding the subject of the dispute, on the side of the plaintiff. The next court session in the Vyshnevetsky's case is scheduled on 26 June 2023.

The second one is on May 25th, about the renowned case of prisoner of conscience **Vitaly Alekseenko**, a Protestant Christian conscientious objector who remains imprisoned in the Kolomyiska Correctional Colony No. 41 since February 23rd 2023, following his conviction to one-year imprisonment sentence for refusing call up to the military on religious conscientious grounds. On 18 February 2023 a cassation complaint was submitted to the Supreme Court, but the Supreme Court refused to suspend his sentence on time of proceedings and scheduled hearings on 25 May 2023.

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. EBCO enjoys participatory status with the Council of Europe since 1998 and is a member of its Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations since 2005. EBCO is entitled to lodge collective complaints concerning the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe since 2021. EBCO provides expertise and legal opinions on behalf of the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe. EBCO 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. EBCO is a full member of the European Youth Forum since 1995.

EBCO calls Ukraine to immediately reverse the suspension of the human right to conscientious objection, release Vitaly Alekseenko and honourably discharge Andrii Vyshnevetsky, as well as acquit all conscientious objectors, including Christian pacifists Mykhailo Yavorsky and Hennadii Tomniuk. Also, EBCO calls Ukraine to lift the prohibition to all men in age from 18 to 60 from leaving the country and other conscription enforcement practices incompatible with human rights obligations of Ukraine, including arbitrary detentions of conscripts and imposition of military registration as prerequisite of legality of any civil relations such as education, employment, marriage, social security, registration of the place of residence, etc.

EBCO calls Russia to immediately and unconditionally release all those hundreds of soldiers and mobilised civilians who object to engage in the war and are illegally detained in a number of centres in Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine. Russian authorities are reportedly using threats, psychological abuse and torture to force those detained to return to the front.

EBCO calls both Russia and Ukraine to safeguard the right to conscientious objection to military service, including in wartime, fully complying with the European and international standards, amongst others the standards set by the European Court of Human Rights.

"The right to conscientious objection to military service is inherent in the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, guaranteed under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which is non-derogable even in a time of public emergency, as stated in Article 4(2) of ICCPR", Derek Brett stated today.

MORE INFORMATION:

EBCO's Press Release and Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2022/23, covering the region of **Council of Europe** (CoE) as well as **Russia** (former CoE member state) and **Belarus** (candidate CoE member state): <https://ebco-beoc.org/node/565>

Focus on the situation in **Russia** - independent report by the "Russian Movement of Conscientious Objectors" (frequently updated): <https://ebco-beoc.org/node/566>

Focus on the situation in **Ukraine** - independent report by the "Ukrainian Pacifist Movement" (frequently updated): <https://ebco-beoc.org/node/567>

Focus on the situation in **Belarus** - independent report by the Belarusian Human Rights Center "Our House" (frequently updated): <https://ebco-beoc.org/node/568>

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