

Conscience and Peace Tax International

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A Group Declaration of Conscience about Paying for War

A document based on the text provided below was endorsed by more than ninety citizens and residents of the United States of America for the purpose of submission to a United Nations human rights review procedure.

This private initiative includes many supplementary personal statements of conscience and it also references all of the legal cases that have been appealed to the United States Supreme Court. These individual statements of conscience may become public, with the permission of the authors, at some future date.

Other groups of people can use this procedure to create powerful expressions of conscience. The process of carefully working together in common on such a submission can be rewarding. Contact Daniel Jenkins (nyauri@gmail.com) for additional information. Work is now commencing on the composition of a universal declaration of conscience about paying for war that may connect peoples of all nationalities and indigenous groups.

A Declaration of Conscience

The signatories of this declaration are citizens and residents of the United States of America. We endorse this statement as individuals who are forbidden by conscience to participate in war or any military activity. The government of the United States violates freedom of conscience rights by forcing us to pay for war.

The United States of America applies a significant proportion of its annual budget to military expenditures. This includes the current cost of active involvement in armed conflict. In paying federal income taxes we contribute personally and directly to such expenditure, in violation of our consciences.

We have responded in various ways. Some of us have taken steps to reduce or eliminate our income tax liability. Some have paid under protest. Some have withheld all or part of the taxes due, redirecting the sums involved to non-violent and humanitarian purposes, or have deposited the money in escrow for any non-military governmental use. Some have challenged federal agencies in the courts. Some have petitioned and campaigned for legislative accommodation. We stress that we are willing to contribute our full share to the expenses of civil society. We simply seek to ensure that the taxes we pay are not used to finance warmaking or preparations for war.

As a result of this conscientious objection we have variously suffered financial hardships, administrative and court fines, garnishment of wages, seizures of bank accounts or other property, deductions from our social security pension payments, and even imprisonment. However, the substance of our remonstrance is that we are all ultimately compelled to pay taxes used for military purposes, and that we have a continuing liability to do so in the future. We have thus been obliged, and are being obliged, in direct violation of our consciences, to be complicit in the funding and waging of war.

We are therefore victims of a violation of our freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which, as defined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, includes the "...freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest...religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." We are from a number of different backgrounds and we hold a variety of moral, ethical and religious beliefs. The conviction that paying for war is wrong derives from these fundamental beliefs. We are being prevented by government authority from manifesting these beliefs in our individual practice and observance.

This violation of conscience is widespread. The signatories of this declaration are among the many thousands of people in the United States of America who have expressed their conscientious objection to the use of their taxes for military expenditures.

This violation is systematic. Written expressions of conscientious objection to military taxation are classified as "frivolous" by the government and subject to punitive fines amounting to thousands of dollars. Our freedom of conscience claims have never been fully reviewed at any level of administrative or judicial consideration, nor are we aware of any case in which this has occurred.

This violation is gross. The conscientious scruples that we invoke reaffirm the dignity, the worth, and the inherent right to life of all persons. We are being compelled by government to support the lethal force of warmaking, in direct violation of our most essential and sacred beliefs.