

CPTI and the UN Human Rights Committee

Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI) was honored to be one of five Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) invited to address a special meeting of the UN Human Rights Committee that was held on the 29th of October in Geneva. This special meeting commemorated the completion of the hundredth session of the Committee, which since the late 1970's has overseen the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The other four organizations were: the CCPR Centre, (which exists to foster NGO liaison with the Committee), and three major international NGOs, namely, Amnesty International (London), Human Rights Watch (New York) and Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (Paris).

This recognition reflects CPTI's involvement with the Committee over recent years. States Party to the ICCPR are obliged to make periodic reports to the Committee on their implementation of the Covenant. Since 2004, CPTI has systematically prepared submissions regarding the status of conscientious objection to military service and related issues (including tax objection where relevant) in the reporting states. And since 2007, this work has been supported by successive grants from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The texts of these submissions can be accessed on the CPTI website and on various Human Rights Committee sessions pages. See: http://www.cpti.ws/cpti_docs/un_list.html and also <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/sessions.htm>



Estefania Gomez (nearest) and Maricely Parada (in pink) attending the UN Human Rights Committee session on Colombia, held in July 2010.

CPTI has not only supplied the Committee with desk research. It has been active in bringing people representing NGOs from reporting states to Geneva to address the Committee directly. In July 2008, when the United Kingdom reported, CPTI Board member Robin Brookes and his Peace Tax Seven and Conscience UK colleague Simon Heywood participated in a NGO briefing; this was the first time the Committee members had ever heard directly from objectors to taxation for military purposes.

In October 2009, Colombia, Israel and the Russian Federation were all on the agenda of the Committee's session. As reported in Bulletin No. 6, CPTI collaborated with QUNO (the Quaker Office at the United Nations in Geneva), to bring conscientious objectors from all three countries to Geneva, and broke new ground by holding a "thematic", rather than country-specific NGO briefing for the Committee.

In July of this past year, the Committee discussed the reports of Colombia and Israel with government delegations, and so CPTI and QUNO again brought conscientious objectors from these countries to address the Committee. (See photo on first page).

Our efforts were rewarded by strong concluding observations on the Russian Federation in October 2009, and on Colombia and Israel this past July. The issue of conscientious objection to military service has also featured in the concluding observations of the Committee on Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Estonia within the past year. CPTI's ongoing work on the issue may also have helped lead the Committee to the very positive decision taken on the linked individual cases of eleven Korean conscientious objectors in March 2010, which will be the subject of a forthcoming bulletin.

Speaking at the commemoration on 29th October, Sir Nigel Rodley, one of the current members of the Committee, recalled that during its early years he had been on the other side of the fence, working for Amnesty International, and that in those days NGOs had been treated with great suspicion. Any information they wanted to contribute they had had to slip surreptitiously to sympathetic Committee members. Things have greatly changed.

These days CPTI and other NGOs do not just supply the Committee with information; they engage ever more closely with it in its deliberations on its own working methods and on the implications of the wider proposals for treaty body reform being discussed in the UN. Some of these issues are reflected in the statement delivered on 29th October by Derek Brett, CPTI Representative in Geneva. That statement is available at: http://www.cpti.ws/cpti_docs/un_list.html

A video of excerpts from the proceedings at the commemorative session, and the texts of all NGO statements, can be found on the website of the CCPR Centre: <http://ccprcentre.org/en/news-release/148-video-of-the-celebration-of-the-human-rights-committees-100th-session>

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