

Conscience and Peace Tax International

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The World Council of Churches takes note of Conscientious Objection to Paying for War

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) recently issued a statement acknowledging that personal resistance to paying tax monies used for warfare is a developing form of conscientious objection. This statement was endorsed during a WCC meeting held from 26 August to 2 September in Geneva, Switzerland.

A study was prepared for the Central Committee by the office of the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence. The Executive Summary of the study states the following:

“This [document] responds to a request from Central Committee for a study on conscientious objection to military service, in light of the 2006 analytical report of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights.” and,

“... the WCC has a role to play in promoting advocacy for conscientious objection as human rights and as a moral, ethical and Christian position of principle, as well as in encouraging churches to assist conscientious objectors where they face prosecution or discrimination.”

See the following weblink:

<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources/documents/thematic-documents/the-right-of-conscientious-objection-to-military-service.html>

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The WCC statement issued in Geneva is called a “Minute on the Right of Conscientious Objection to Military Service.” Two relevant excerpts are as follows:

Paragraph 6:

“It is also noted that in some countries where there is a right to conscientious objection to military service, some Christians have become sensitive to the use of their tax money for supporting war, and in some cases have faced government action against them because of their conscientious objection to paying for war. This development of conscientious objection deserves further study and consideration.”

Section F:

“[The WCC] encourages churches to study and address the issue of military or war taxes and of alternatives to military service.”

The full text of the WCC statement can be accessed at:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2009/reports-and-documents/report-on-public-issues/minute-on-the-right-of-conscientious-objection-to-military-service.html>

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A survey concerning conscientious objection to military taxation and Churches in Germany, written by Hannelore Morgenstern-Przygoda (Vice-Chair of the CPTI Board), was used as a reference by those who prepared the WCC study and statement.

The full text of this German survey, entitled "Militärsteuer-Verweigerung und Kirchen in Deutschland - Kirchliche Reaktionen und Positionen zur Absicht der Militärsteuer-Verweigerung - Mai 2009," can be accessed at:

[http://www.netzwerk-friedenssteuer.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=71&Itemid=105 /Militaersteuerverweigerung und Kirchen](http://www.netzwerk-friedenssteuer.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=71&Itemid=105/Militaersteuerverweigerung_und_Kirchen)

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An annual report of a committee under the New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), written by Naomi Paz Greenberg (a CPTI Representative to the United Nations) and Karen Reixach, was also provided to those who did background research for the WCC study and statement.

The NYYM Conscientious Objection to Paying for War Committee report can be accessed (see pages 100-102) at:

<http://www.nnym.org/pubs/yb09-10/advrpt09-10online.pdf>

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There appears to be a slow but steady groundswell of acknowledgement by various organizations that any form of coerced participation in the conduct of warfare may violate individual freedom of conscience rights.

CPTI is actively involved in discussions about setting up a workshop on conscientious objection to all aspects of military service at the WCC General Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, in 2012.

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