

The Human Right Not to Pay for War

“In the context of the right not to be complicit in killings, we call for full legal recognition of the rights of conscientious objectors.”

Declaration and Agenda for Action: Millennium Forum 2000

Thursday March 25th, 2004

12 noon -1:30 PM

**Boss Room, Church Center,
777 United Nations Plaza (44 St. and Ls Ave.)**

Moderator:

ROSA PACKARD,

Convenor the NGO Working Group on Conscientious Objection.
Associated with the Quaker United Nations Office for issues of conscientious objection

Presenters:

(Representative of OHCHR if available)

The evolving recognition of the human right of conscientious objection, and the Best Practices Report of the OHCHR on Conscientious Objection to the Commission in 2004.

MARIAN FRANZ,

Vice Chair, Conscience and Peace Tax International
will introduce the video [Committed to Conscience](#) explaining the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Bill and comment on international campaigns for similar human rights legislation.

BILL PERKINS,

Deputy Majority Leader of the New York City Council
will discuss support for this human rights issue through a local city council resolution

SHULAMITH KOENIG,

Founder,, Peoples Movement for Human Rights Education International
“Winner of the UN Human Rights Prize-2003-”
will discuss relevant individual and collective efforts to protect human rights

Sponsored by

INTERNATIONAL NGO COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

NGO WORKING GROUP ON CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

Brown bag lunch: Light refreshments offered
For further information: <<http://www.cpti.ws>>
rpackard@optonline.net

ROSA PACKARD, I am the convenor of the NGO Working Group on conscientious objection here at the United Nations, a group of nongovernmental organizations that carry the concern of conscientious objection to military service and conscientious objection to military taxation. I am also associated with the Quaker United Nations office for issues of conscientious objection.

The representative of the New York UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights cannot be with us today, so I will briefly comment on the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights' report for the 60th session of the Commission on Human Rights. It reviews the treatment of conscientious objectors to military service in various United Nation's documents and in various countries and recalls that the human right of conscientious objection is grounded in existing human rights norms guaranteeing the right to freedom of conscience, religion, belief and thought. It concludes that an increasing number of member states are continuing to develop or improve provisions for conscientious objection to military service so as to comply with existing human rights norms. We have copies for those who are interested on the literature table.

Many people are not well informed about the human right of conscientious objection. We want to raise its visibility. To help with that, we hope you will circulate some of the documents on the literature table.

One document is a resolution of the Commission on Human Rights which gives some minimum standards for countries to consider in recognizing the human right of conscientious objection to military service.

Another document is General Comment 22 from the Human Rights Committee which monitors the International Protocol on Civil and Political Rights. They hear cases and question states when they give their reports to determine if they have met the human rights standards agreed to by the United Nations. Comment 22 states the Human Rights Committees determination that conscientious objection can be derived from freedom on conscience, thought and religion in Article 18 of the Charter.

A third document is this year's written statement to the Commission on Human Rights by Conscience and Peace Tax International which is a nongovernmental organization accredited to the United Nations with consultative status. This concludes that:

“We submit that none of the practices identified so far enough in giving due recognition to the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion

in this sphere. Those who have a conscientious objection to paying for military expenditure do not wish to pay less tax than their fellow citizens, nor do they wish to be forced into breaking the law. As a minimum, therefore, we call upon States to create a machinery for accepting requests from individual citizens who in exercise of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion request that their personal tax payment be not applied to military purposes, and for implementing such requests in a public and verifiable manner, for instance by placing the sums involved in a separate fund (a “peace tax fund”), from which their disbursement to non military purposes would be clearly and separately accounted. Ultimately, we would urge that such funds be explicitly allocated to peace-building and conflict prevention purposes, thus enabling citizens to exercise the moral duty to pay for peace as well as the right not to pay for war. “

That is some of the UN context for raising the issue of the human right not to pay for war.

Now I would like to introduce our distinguished panel members.

Marian Franz, vice-chair of the board of Conscience and Peace Tax International, will be commenting on international campaigns for peace tax legislation and show a video which explains proposed legislation in the United States which has stimulated similar efforts in other countries.

Bill Perkins, Deputy Majority leader of the New York City Council is soon introducing a New York City Council Resolution urging support of the US peace tax legislation. described in the video.

Shula Koenig, founder of the Peoples Movement for Human Rights Education and winner of the UN Human Rights Prize in 2003 will help us understand how the global idea of paying for peace starts with local efforts of implementing human rights where we live.

Then the panel members each will speak for five or ten minutes, followed by questions from the audience.

MARIAN FRANZ

As we watch this ten minute video, “Committed to Conscience” we can think of it as one example of peace tax campaigns that are going on in other countries as well. The Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Bill, HR 2037 was introduced into the US House of Representatives by Representative John Lewis of Georgia and has 40 cosponsors. The video describes the dilemma the bill addresses, and the range of support it has obtained.

(The video is available from the National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund.
<<http://www.peacetaxfund.org>>

ROSA PACKARD Welcome to those of you who came in after we started. That was a film on peace fund tax legislation in this country and this is Marian Franz who is vice-chair of Conscience and Peace Tax International

MARIAN FRANZ

I am going to be speaking, not in my role lobbying for the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Bill in Washington DC as you saw in the film, but out of my work with Conscience and Peace Tax International. There are peace tax campaigns in various countries about the world. In 1986 the German Peace Tax Campaign invited the others to come together. It was an empowering experience. As the different groups introduced themselves, many gave their date of origin as the 1980's. Many also gave in the name of their campaigns, the number 572. The reason was that during the Cold War, the United States planted 572 Cruise and Pershing Missiles on European soil. Europeans felt that they were a football field on which this struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union would be played and there was a lot of resistance to that. We learned that in most countries the situation is similar. Failure to pay taxes because of conscientious objection to military taxation results in seizure of property, and in court appearances. In rare instances people have lost their homes or gone to prison.

The International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns has since met every two years for the last decade. Some of its participants formed an international organization: Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI) which now has consultative status at the United Nations. We will testify for the third year next week at the meeting of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva under item 11 - conscientious objection to military service.

I'll give some examples of international activity on this issue:

In Britain, in 1981, the Manchester Guardian printed a letter signed by some members of Parliament and religious leaders advocating recognition of the right to conscientious objection to military taxation.

In Canada in 1982, the new Canadian Constitution guaranteed freedom of conscience. Dr. Jerilyn Prior, then brought test case on behalf of herself and other conscientious objectors to military taxation through the Canadian legal system and then appealed to the UN Human Rights Committee.

In Italy, individuals and organizations who were conscientious objectors to military taxation were charged with incitement - with urging others not to pay. They were acquitted. The government appealed and the conscientious objectors were upheld. They now pay their military taxes to various nongovernmental organizations and more recently pay it to the government's department for nonviolent civilian defense.

Tax resistance takes many forms. In one case they went to their legislature with a small can of blood and told them to take the money out from there. In Germany they made stickers the size of coins that say “No more for military”. They put these stickers on coins and when they exchange currency the message gets around.

In Russia in 1820 the government exempted pacifists from paying war taxes.

In Palestine there was a tax revolt against taxes taken by the Israeli authorities. “We will not pay the taxes that kill our children.” Their goods were confiscated. One Palestinian who came to an international conference said they came to his home and threw the TV set out of the second story window.

My favorite definition of conscience is from Pope John XXIII. Deep inside of each of us, where we live and where we are alone with God, we detect a law that we did not put there. It says do this. Don’t do that. That is true all around the world.

ROSA PACKARD Thank you Marian.

Those of us who are troubled by what we feel is complicity in killing and want legal recognition of the rights of conscientious objectors to paying for war are heartened by the local action of our next speaker. Bill Perkins is a New York City Councilman. He is Deputy Majority Leader of the New York City Council . He announced on March 20th that he intended to introduce a City Council Resolution urging support of peace tax legislation.

I can’t tell you how much this means for those of us who have carried this concern for years and have been ignored and penalized by many even though some times applauded by a few friends. It means a great deal to us for this issue to become more visible. Bill Perkins introduced a City Council Resolution a little while ago against the Patriot Act which passed and we hope this one will too.

BILL PERKINS. Thank you for the opportunity to join you.
I am not going speak at length.

We just heard a global expression of the universal right to conscientious objection not only as a matter of faith and religion but also from an ethical and moral point of view. I don’t think there is much of a debate about that.

The debate becomes a matter of how to translate that into governmental acceptance so that individuals do not have to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their conscience. My objective is to contribute to that aspect of this movement - particularly by raising consciousness on the part of New Yorkers with regard to the bill introduced by John Lewis. The support has been growing to include even my Congressman, Charles Rangel.

For those of you who may not know, the district that I represent includes Central Harlem, Upper Westside, Morningside Heights, and Columbia University as well as Spanish

Harlem. Its a very diverse district, an exiting district, a district that has a tradition of being active in progressive issues: anti war, civil rights and so forth I claim the legacy and heritage of a lot of social justice movements and this issue falls right in that vein, as far as I am concerned.

In this era of post 9-11, we were able in New York City to support a resolution that I put forward against the war in Iraq. It was part of a campaign organized by the Institute for Policy Studies under the banner of Cities for Peace. New York City was very important in that regard because, after all, we were the target of the terrorist attack. For us to declare, through my resolution being supported by the Council, that this war should not be prosecuted in our name becomes significant as a counter attack to this Administration's claim that we needed the war to fight terrorism because of what happened in New York. So we were proud that we were able to go on record as against the war on Iraq.

Of course that was followed by a resolution that recognized that the Patriot Act was undermining civil rights and civil liberties. Frankly the peace tax legislation is a must on civil rights and civil liberties. That is why it makes sense with the work that I have been doing. It is consistent with that work.

The most significant thing about this for me may not simply be the affirmation of the right of conscience but, the opportunity to popularize this movement. No disrespect whatsoever to the national and international level, the global level, on which this movement has been taking place for the last thirty years with some apparent success. I am fascinated by what you shared about Italy. I would like to look more closely at that.

My experience teaches me that the local is global and the global is local and so through the leverage that I have in terms of the City Council I want to put forward this idea as a piece of legislation, a resolution that will trigger debate, that will trigger discussion about a very, very important and exciting concept. It may not otherwise be as grassroots, as popular, as accessible intellectually to the citizens of New York. And I think it would ultimately add fuel to the campaign on the national level.

It was very, very important for my US Congressman to know that I was supporting his position on the war. It was very, very important for my US Congressman to know that I was supporting his position on the Patriot Act. It is very, very important for legislators to know where their constituents are coming from. And so I think that as New York goes, egotistically speaking, so goes the nation.

So I am sort of inspired and encouraged by the possibilities that this resolution that I am putting forward in the Council will result in a debate. The most significant thing that happened with the Anti War Resolution and the Patriot Act Resolution was not simply that they were passed. More important was the amount of media and the amount of debate that they generated: Especially this was true of the anti war resolution which worked the Council into the epicenter of the national discussion about what is right and what is wrong with regard to going to war.

Let me conclude with one important reason why this has to be done. Thanks to Neena Das, who brought this movement to my attention, it has become clear to me that an unusual amount of the tax dollars of the city and the nation is being used for war and militarism. tax dollars that I as a legislator do not have available to address local concerns!

You may have recently heard about the extraordinary problems that we have been having with the public schools in New York City. That's a dollars and cents issue.

You may have heard recently about the extraordinarily high unemployment not only in the nation but particularly in New York City and particularly among African American men. Over fifty percent! It was written up in the New York Times: a study that was sponsored by the Community Service Society. That is very often a matter of dollars and cents.

You may hear, if you are from New York City, the debate about the fiscal crisis that New York City is in. We are among many cities in the United States trying to balance our budgets in such a way that we continue to provide our citizen with the services to which their tax dollars are expected to go. This war is a diversion in that respect. Militarism in general is a diversion in that respect.

We learned this with the experience of the Vietnam War. As a child of the sixties, I recall that on one hand we were pursuing an unjust war in Vietnam and at the same time we were talking about a war against poverty. The war on poverty epitomized the best vision of this nation or of any other nation. And guess what happened to the war on poverty! Those resources were diverted to the war in Vietnam, crippling the war against poverty. We have yet to recover from that diversion. In many respects, I see the same thing going on to day. The peace tax offers us an opportunity to redirect those resources in a way that makes sense for those of us who are interested in good government, in public service, in making sure the taxpayers get the services for which they are paying.

ROSA PACKARD. Thank you very much. I nodded my head in affirmation during every word of that.

MARIAN FRANZ Do you know how much you mean to us?

ROSA PACKARD No I don't think he does but he will pretty soon. Another person who is a citizen of New York as well as of the world is

SHULA KOENIG I want you to know I live at 111 street Is that your district?

BILL PERKINS Yes!

SHULA KOENIG: Really!!

ROSA PACKARD Hot Dog!

BILL PERKINS Where on 111th Street?

SHULA KOENIG On 111th between Amsterdam and Broadway

BILL KOENIG Yes! It's up there by St. John the Divine. I am going there to a meeting after this.

SHULA KOENIG I think I voted for you. But I am not sure. If you are a Democrat I voted for you.

BILL PERKINS I think you did.

ROSA PACKARD That is Shula Koenig. She is the founder of the People Dedicated for Human Rights Education International and the winner of the UN Human Rights prize this past year. She introduced the idea and took the initiative for the UN Decade for Human Rights Education which has just come to a close. She is a remarkable woman and her organization is also remarkable. It has a cities program! She will say more about how important human rights are when you do something about them locally.

SHULA KOENIG. It's hard to speak about this. I was an officer in the Israeli army many years ago - in forty-eight. So, don't bother yourself, I am seventy -four years old. I left the army for this reason of conscience in 1950. Twenty five years ago when I came to this country, not liking what my country was doing and having three sons, I was interviewed on the MacNeil Leher show. I called Sharon a war criminal. I said I left my country because I didn't want my sons to fight unjust wars. I was able to come to this country in order for my sons to be conscientious objectors because I was married to an American. So we took our consciences to this country. I said this on television and since then whenever my name is mentioned in Israel, (They didn't even mention it when I won the prize, which was a very big pride for my country that I did .) they called me a traitor. So being a conscientious objector and a traitor is a very good insignia.

I want you to understand deep inside you that we have a gift. We have a framework that was created across the street at the UN for the last sixty years. Everything is there and was encoded. All the things to do with the poor and all the things to do with war and all the vision of Isaiah or Mohammed or Jesus or anybody - it is in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the work of the UN for sixty years and was encoded.

I have friends who are intellectuals and political activists to whom I give a little booklet which is a summary of all the human rights resolutions and many of them call me the next morning and say, "You know, I cried when I read that. Why didn't I know about it?"

We don't speak about rights but about human rights. We fight for a right because it is a human right.

I was told that Martin Luther King was killed because he started fighting for human rights and he looked at poverty as a human rights issue. This is why he was killed. It wasn't only rights for the black people in this country but for human rights for all. He looked at human rights as unconditional love.

Just before the Intifada I was in Ramallah. Boys from a boys school came out with big signs saying "We want books" and I said, "You don't want books." They looked at me. "What do you mean?" I said, let us go inside and let's make new signs. The new signs said "We want our human rights. We want books."

So the suggestion I bring to you is to say we want our human rights. It means food. It means housing. It means conscience. It means beliefs and it means religion. Don't compartmentalize it. The minute you compartmentalize it, the government loves it because they can give just a little bit. But when you come to them with the full concept of human rights which is about the sanctity of life, you can say, "As a tax payer I want to be allowed to pay for human rights. You are not doing me a favor, you are fulfilling my human rights."

Our web site <<http://www.pdhre.org>> may help you to comprehend more what I am saying. We have taken twenty three issues and groups and we show how governments have made statements and made commitments about specific human rights. And we show how when we understand the issues holistically we can move forward together.

If we know this we refashion our lives accordingly. And for this purpose we have established human rights cities around the world where the community plans its life in the human rights framework.

We need to learn there is a framework. When you walk down the street you don't cross at the red. You have to protect yourself and the drivers have to protect themselves. It is an interchange. When I gave my acceptance speech people said to me, "Can I join your church?". I said, "Yes you can join that church but it is not my church." I believe that human rights is a secular religion that makes every other religions better. Unlike many it accepts women as full human beings.

You can reach many hearts with this one objection not to pay taxes for war. It has to do with better health insurance, with better schools, with us as full human beings. This one objection not to pay all my taxes for war can change our whole lives if you look at human rights holistically. It is not only because of conscience or preference but because you say "I am a human rights person and you can't take my human rights away from me. Human rights belong to all of us. We are doing human rights work."