



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/HRC/1/NGO/24
28 June 2006

ENGLISH ONLY

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
First session
Agenda item 4

**IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 60/251
OF 15 MARCH 2006 ENTITLED “HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL”**

**Written statement* submitted by Conscience and Peace Pax International (CPTI), a
non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 June 2006]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion: conscientious objection to military service

Conscience and Peace Tax International wishes to associate itself with the call made in the statement by the International Association for Religious Freedom and others, on the mandate and work of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, for the Human Rights Council to move urgently beyond procedural discussions to deal with the substantive business in the reports of this and other special procedures.

We would like to draw special attention to one aspect of the freedom to manifest religion or belief, namely the right of conscientious objection. In the annexe to her report concerning cases transmitted to Governments (E.CN.4/2006/5 Add.1), the Special Rapporteur gives details of interventions she has made on behalf of conscientious objectors to military service in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, the Republic of Korea, Turkey and Turkmenistan. In addition, the Government response received from Eritrea regarding imprisoned members of minority religions indicated that their imprisonment had been on grounds of refusal to perform military service, and the issues regarding registration of religions she raised with a number of other States could have an effect on the right of conscientious objection - Romania and Uzbekistan, in particular, are prepared to recognise conscientious objectors from listed denominations only.

In addition to the report of the Special Rapporteur, the final session of the Commission was to consider an excellent analytical report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on best practices in relation to conscientious objection to military service (E/CN.4/2006/51). We strongly commend this report to the Council, and hope that an early opportunity will be taken to give it the full consideration which it deserves.

Over the years, the Commission on Human Rights did excellent work in establishing the international standards for the recognition and treatment of conscientious objectors. As was shown in the report entitled "Military Recruitment and Conscientious Objection - A Thematic Global Survey" which we published in May 2006,¹ this standard-setting has contributed to an appreciable improvement to the conditions faced by conscientious objectors in many parts of the world in the course of the last two decades, but there are still variations on the ground and areas in which the freedoms of thought, conscience and religion in this respect remain subject to severe constraints. In particular, there is a tendency to overlook conscientious objection which arises outside the narrow context of conscription. This applies for instance when a person who has willingly joined the armed forces subsequently experiences a change of belief. Similarly, our report shows that in a surprising number of countries military service can in certain cases be commuted directly into a financial payment. This does nothing for those whose fundamental religious, moral, or ethical principles are violated when they are forced to contribute in any manner whatsoever to military preparations and military actions - a concern which can apply not only to such explicit military taxes but also to the financing of military expenditure through general compulsory taxation. Our organisation looks forward to the day when genuine and

¹ The report may be consulted on the CPTI website, or copies may be ordered (price EUR 10) from cpti@cpti.ws.

profound objections of this nature are accommodated fully along with other aspects of conscientious objection to military service.

We look forward to future collaboration with the Council as it inherits and carries forward the achievements of the Commission on Human Rights with regard to conscientious objection to military service in particular and freedom of thought, conscience and religion in general.

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