Human Rights Council, 49th Session  
Geneva, 10th March 2022

Item 2: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the freedom of religion or belief

Joint oral statement delivered by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Mr. President,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for His report1 and share the same concern for the violation of the right to conscientious objection to military service of objectors from religious or belief minorities.

We are aware of two Jehovah’s Witnesses currently imprisoned as conscientious objectors in South Korea.2 There are twenty others imprisoned in Eritrea3 where there is a system of indefinite National Service.

Last year we had the case of Ukrainian protestant conscientious objectors in the Rivne region whose right has been violated.4

Violations of the right to conscientious objection to military service continue in many countries.

In Colombia, young people are recruited by the official army through arbitrary detentions [batidas], although the Constitutional Court has forbidden it in 2011.5

Conscientious objectors continue to be imprisoned in various countries, such as Turkmenistan6, Singapore7, Eritrea8, Tajikistan9, Israel10.

In Turkey, Eritrea and Singapore the right is not recognized. Turkish objectors are facing a situation of “civil death”.11

As highlighted by the SR in His report, we are deeply alarmed by the violation of this right in situations of armed conflicts.

Ukraine compels all males of age 18-60 to take arms and fight in the current war; on the other side we witness the arresting of thousands of anti-war Russian citizens, and we hear that not only contract soldiers, but also ordinary conscripts are employed in the war.12

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a non-derogable right, like freedom of expression, and it continues to apply regardless of a situation of armed conflict.

We urge all member States to release all imprisoned conscientious objectors and respect international standards [for the exercise of the right to conscientious objection].

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10 https://mobile.twitter.com/KevinRothrock/status/1501567647741358082
11 The situation of conscientious objectors is defined as “civil death” by European Court of Human Rights. (Ulke v. Turkey, application no. 39437/98).