



# **The Right of Conscientious Objection to Military Service**



**World Council of Churches  
Decade to Overcome Violence**



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## **The Right of Conscientious Objection to Military Service**

*A study prepared for the World Council of Churches Central Committee (Geneva, 2009) by the office of the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence.*

*The pioneers of a world without war are the youth who refuse military service.* Albert Einstein

### **Executive Summary**

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. The study which is now presented to Central Committee by the WCC's DOV Office is divided in four parts:

The first part traces the discussion of and action on conscientious objection in the WCC and the ecumenical movement. The WCC submitted a *Statement on the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service* to the UN in 1973. Several churches and related organizations, primarily in Europe and North America have spoken to the issue or have taken action in favor of conscientious objectors.

The second part examines approaches to conscientious objection according to the UN analytical report, and to recent news. While the issue is complex, a few observations are pertinent: First, conscientious objection is recognized by the UN as a human right. However, the practice in many countries is not in compliance with international standard. Furthermore, no conscription does not mean there is no need for the right to conscientious objection in particular situations of armed conflict. There may be selective objection to specific duties or it may be that a soldier becomes a conscientious objector.

In the third part, some specific examples are given of how churches deal with the question of the right of conscientious objection. In several countries, especially in Europe and North America, churches or church related associations take particular action in favor of conscientious objection or to provide moral, spiritual and legal assistance to conscientious objectors in their struggle.

Finally, some observations, perspectives and recommendations are shared. While this study is open for further work as the discussion evolves and the issues persist, the conclusion is that it is appropriate and necessary for the WCC to call on churches to support conscientious objection to military service: Churches have a role in advocating compliance with universal human rights and international law. Moreover, in a context where conscription may have declined, but wars or armed conflicts take mostly civilian lives and do not comply with UN resolutions or international law, conscientious objection may increasingly be seen as a moral obligation, both by religious communities and by civil society. Furthermore, would it not be inconsistent of churches to call war immoral or illegal and not encourage their members to object enrollment in active duty and help them work through the issues and consequences, in Christ's footsteps?

These are some of the reasons why 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.

## **Introduction**

The term “conscientious objection” as used by the United Nations and in this study means the refusal to serve in the military for religious or ethical reasons of conscience. The UN affirmation of the right to refuse to do military service does not imply that a conscientious objector’s status *is* always recognized by the particular government but that it *should* be recognized.

Young conscripts may consider carrying and using weapons as contrary to their religious values. Consequently they refuse military service and opt for alternative civilian service. Professional soldiers sometimes also become conscientious objectors, be it by changing their mind and their beliefs in general or by renouncing participation in a specific war.

However, conscientious objection has not been legalized in all countries and the option of alternative service may not be available. Under these circumstances, conscientious objectors are often subject to discrimination, prosecution, repeated punishment, and imprisonment.

The freedoms of thought, conscience and religion are involved in an individual’s decision not to serve in the military and not to train for or engage in armed combat. A decision to refuse to bear arms is linked to basic aspects of human dignity and personal integrity.

In 2006 the World Council of Churches Central Committee requested a study on the right of conscientious objection to military service.<sup>1</sup> The study was to be undertaken “in light of the analytical report” issued earlier that year by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>2</sup> and submitted to the Central Committee for consideration and possible action.

Understanding the right to conscientious objection is closely linked to the aims of the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence. The issue is prominent in ecumenical peace work long before the Decade, for example, in the promotion of a culture of peace.<sup>3</sup> A culture of peace cannot be obtained by the use of armed force nor by passively refusing violent means, churches have noted, but by an active and constructive attitude and practice in the spirit of nonviolence, aiming for a just peace, following the teaching and example of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this study is to inform the Central Committee and invite possible action on the human right of conscientious objection for religious, moral or ethical reasons in accordance with

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<sup>1</sup> “Final Report of the Public Issues Committee” (Document No. GEN/PUB 06), Central Committee, September 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *Civil and Political Rights, Including the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service* - E/CN.4/2006/51 – UNHCHR, 27 February 2006.

<sup>3</sup> *CEC and EAK Consultation on Conscientious Objection and Peace Service. The World Council of Churches Programme to Overcome Violence: a Theological Framework to consider the Issue of Conscientious Objection*, 1995.

article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), General Comment No. 22 of the UN Commission on Human Rights and the other jurisprudence of the Commission.<sup>4</sup>

## **I. Conscientious objection in the WCC and the ecumenical movement**

Many churches in the world affirm the rights of conscientious objectors with statements, publications or supportive actions. Among them are a significant number of WCC member churches from various traditions – Baptist, Anglican, Lutheran, United Church, Pentecostal and Anabaptist.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the WCC membership, support for conscientious objection has come from the churches in the Catholic, Historic Peace Church, Adventist and other traditions.<sup>6</sup>

Church organizations with a focus on conscientious objection include: WCC Decade to Overcome Violence, Conference of European Churches (CEC), the Catholic peace movement Pax Christi International, *Evangelische Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Betreuung der Kriegsdienstverweigerer* in Germany, and several associations initiated by Mennonites, such as the Korean Anabaptist Center, *Justapaz* in Columbia and the Military Counseling Network in Germany.

Sometimes conscientious objection is not dealt with as a separate topic, but is included or implied in more general statements about peacemaking and disarmament. Examples are the Church of Ireland and the Lutheran World Federation.

Generally, the churches that address and defend the rights of conscientious objectors are historic peace churches regardless of location and churches in Western Europe and North America. Research for this study indicates that it is not common for African or Asian churches to discuss the topic or to give active consideration to options for changing the situation. In Sudan, for example, pastors were tortured by rebels because they publicly condemned the forced recruitment of children and young men during the recent civil war.

We have no record of a church resolution condemning conscientious objection in general. A statement by the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) in 2001 spoke against the support of conscientious objectors in the context of objection by members of the Jehovah's

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<sup>4</sup> The freedom of thought, conscience and religion is guaranteed by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). This includes implicitly the right of conscientious objection to military service as General Comment No. 22 and the case law of the UN Commission on Human Rights set out explicitly.

<sup>5</sup> Within these church families, some of the churches affirming the right of objection to military service are Church of England, Church of the Brethren, Episcopal Church USA, Evangelical Church in Germany/*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD), United Church of Canada, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Uniting Church in Australia and Mennonite churches

<sup>6</sup> Roman Catholic Church, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Church of God in Christ (COGIC), Church of the Nazarene and Seventh-day Adventists.

Witnesses. In the meantime the NCKK has moderated its opinion and advocated for alternative civilian service in 2008.<sup>7</sup>

Orthodox Churches. Our research indicates that Orthodox churches generally do not support conscientious objection. This may be due to a factor present in the life of many churches, namely, the level of identification between church and nation.<sup>8</sup> In their history Orthodox churches have at times been supportive of defensive wars and wars of liberation.<sup>9</sup> So of course have many other churches. Nonetheless, Orthodoxy upholds the ideal of non-violent peacemaking<sup>10</sup> and we know of no written declaration against conscientious objection. Killing in war is considered a sin and requires forgiveness.<sup>11</sup> Orthodox member churches did not object to CEC statements in favour of conscientious objection. The Orthodox Peace Fellowship encourages young Orthodox Christians to become conscientious objectors.<sup>12</sup> There are also Orthodox voices requesting the Institute for Peace Studies in Eastern Christianity in Massachusetts to develop studies on the compatibility of states' practices on conscientious objection with the ICCPR.<sup>13</sup>

Churches support conscientious objection for biblical, theological and ethical reasons. The refusal to bear arms is in agreement with the gospel and the teachings of Jesus Christ, especially in the Sermon on the Mount and the command to love one's enemies. Some churches feel bound by the Gospel to the wider tradition of non-violence. The rejection of killing even in war as a Christian option (or a Christian duty for the historic peace churches) is grounded in respect for the value and sanctity of human life. Often the churches' ethical reflections refer to the UN standards declaring conscientious objection a human right.

A public ecumenical position is outlined in the *Statement on the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service*<sup>14</sup> submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1973 by the WCC-CCIA and eight NGOs.<sup>15</sup> The document emphasizes the "widespread and growing concern in the world's religious communities that young people who refuse to participate in a

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<sup>7</sup> Both NCKK's statements are available in Korean at: [www.kncc.or.kr](http://www.kncc.or.kr)

<sup>8</sup> O. Clément, „The Orthodox Church and Peace – Some Reflections“, Milano 1991, in: *For the Peace from Above: An Orthodox Resource Book on War, Peace and Nationalism*, Bialystok, Poland, Syndesmos, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth (ed.), Orthdruck Printing House, 1999, 175; Simion, Gh. M.: „Polegomena to a Peace Studies Model for Eastern Christianity“, in: *Journal of the American Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Simion, Gh. M. (ed.) Vol. 2005-2009, No.29-33, 2009, 81:86.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 175-176.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon, „Exorcising War“, 172-173.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; O. Clément, „The Orthodox Church and Peace – Some Reflections“, 81-83.

<sup>12</sup> *Orthodox Christians and Conscientious Objection*, by J. Forest, 12 September 2008; <http://incommunion.org/articles/essays/orthodox-christians-and-conscientious-objection>, 22 May 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Simion, Gh. M.: „Polegomena to a Peace Studies Model for Eastern Christianity“, *ARA Journal*, volume 2005-2009, No.29-23, 87.

<sup>14</sup> *The Churches in International Affairs: Reports 1970-1973*, Geneva, World Council of Churches (ed.), 1974, 136-138.

<sup>15</sup> UN Symbol for this document: E/CN.4/NGO/171, of 9 March 1973.

war on conscientious grounds should not be penalized for their moral stand.”<sup>16</sup> A “conscientiously held conviction”<sup>17</sup> is further seen as “a vital and integral part of the individual who holds it.”<sup>18</sup> The statement concludes: “(We) urge the Commission on Human Rights (...) to recommend to the United Nations General Assembly the adoption of a declaration recognizing that conscientious objection to military service is a valid expression of the right of freedom of conscience, and that conscientious objectors should have alternative means of service to the community available to them.”<sup>19</sup> This recommendation was later adopted by the UN Human Rights Council.<sup>20</sup> In one application of this policy in 2007 in the Republic of Korea, the UN Human Rights Council included conscientious objection to military service under the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion which is guaranteed in Article 18 of the ICCPR.

After the 1973 statement, which interestingly does not contain any theological or biblical reference, the right to conscientious objection has been raised by the WCC in minutes, reports, programme proposals and a Central Committee Statement on Peace and Justice in 1983.<sup>21</sup> It arises in a 1989 minority statement<sup>22</sup> and then in the final document of the World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) in Seoul, Korea, 1990. Here the term refers not only to military service but also to the payment of military taxes. Alternatives to both are demanded.<sup>23</sup>

Since Seoul 1990 the question of conscientious objection has not received the same level of separate attention from the WCC. One reason, aside from the changed context since the end of the Cold War, might be the persistence of differing views among member churches concerning

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<sup>16</sup> *The Churches in International Affairs: Reports 1970-1973*, Geneva, World Council of Churches (ed.), 1974, 136.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>20</sup> See the commission’s 1993 General Comment No.22, para.11, in UN document CCPR/C/88/D/1321-1322/2004, of 23 January 2007.

<sup>21</sup> For a brief summary of the messages on conscientious objection in these documents cf. Gible, H.L.: „The World Council of Churches and the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service“, in: *European Churches and Conscientious Objection to Military Service: A contribution to the conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation*; proceedings of an international conference held at Loccum, 25 to 28 September 1989, Bremen, German Protestant Association for the Care of Conscientious Objectors (EAK, ed.), 1991, 15-17; Gathered for Life. Official Report IV Assembly World Council of Churches, Geneva, D. Gill (ed.), WCC Publications, 1983, 133: „We strongly reiterate the Central Committee’s appeals to the churches to (...) e) pay serious attention to the rights of conscientious objectors“.

<sup>22</sup> Minority statement by the historic peace churches and other delegates: cf. *Frieden in Gerechtigkeit. Dokumente der Europäischen Versammlung*, Basel/Zürich, Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops’ Conferences (ed.), 1989, 164; English version in a summarized form cf. *Peace with Justice. The official documentation of the European Ecumenical Assembly, Basel, Switzerland. 15-21 May, 1989*, Geneva, Conference of European Churches (ed.), 1989, 132.

<sup>23</sup> *Now is the Time: Final Documents & Other Texts, World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*. Seoul 1990, revised version, Geneva 1990, 29.

just war and the use of violence by Christians in particular situations.<sup>24</sup> Opinions range from radical pacifism and the tradition of nonviolence to the theory of just war and the duty to defend one's home country. While the historic peace churches uphold a pacifist point of view, described by some as radical or idealist, other churches proclaim a position they describe as moderate or realist. For peace churches violence is never justified and cannot be reconciled with following Jesus. For other churches force can be a last resort to prevent gross injustices or the escalation of violence. Some churches see military service as a Christian duty; other churches see it as an impossibility. In-between are churches that see military service as an option for Christians. This middle group typically refers to the responsibility of the individual to make his or her own decision for or against military or armed service. Examples are the Roman Catholic Church<sup>25</sup>, the EKD<sup>26</sup>, the Episcopal Church<sup>27</sup> and the United Methodist Church<sup>28</sup>. In the Protestant tradition this inclusive position is often a result of differences within each church ranging from pacifism to the support of the military.

Related objections to 'just war'. There appears to be a tendency among certain churches of the ecumenical community to break from the classical theory of just war. Although the EKD, the US Episcopal Church and some Orthodox churches concede that violence might be used as an ultimate rationale, they admit that in times of modern warfare it is problematic to call a war justified.<sup>29</sup> The Orthodox Church tradition has never had a theory of just war.<sup>30</sup> Among European Christians there are more and more voices criticizing attempts to resolve conflicts militarily because of indiscriminate use of force, acts of brutality and escalation of violence resulting in large numbers of civilian deaths and widespread destruction. The *Mennonite and Catholic Contribution to the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence*, January

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<sup>24</sup> For more information on this discussion cf. *The Responsibility to Protect: Ethical and Theological Reflections*, CCIA report to the WCC Central Committee, Geneva 2003; Gible, H.L.: *The World Council of Churches and the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service*, in: *European Churches and Conscientious Objection to Military Service. A contribution to the conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation*; proceedings of an international conference held at Loccum, 25 to 28 September 1989, Bremen, German Protestant Association for the Care of Conscientious Objectors (EAK, ed.), 1991, 11-27..

<sup>25</sup> "Bishops' President Deeply Regrets War; Call for Prayer, Protection of the Innocent, And Steps to Avert Humanitarian Crisis", 19 March 2003; [www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2003/03-065.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2003/03-065.shtml) 14 May 2009.

<sup>26</sup> *Schritte auf dem Weg des Friedens. Ein Beitrag des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*, EKD-Texte 48, 1994 (3rd edition 2001), art. 4b; [www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44654.html](http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44654.html) , 13 May 2009.

<sup>27</sup> "Episcopal Church's View", [www.episcopalchurch.org/50917\\_51107\\_ENG\\_HTM.htm?menupage=51106](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/50917_51107_ENG_HTM.htm?menupage=51106), 13 May 2009.

<sup>28</sup> "Tacoma congregation declares sanctuary for war resisters," [http://www.umc.org/site/c.gjJTJbMUIuE/b.1802107/k.B1E4/Tacoma\\_congregation\\_declares\\_sanctuary\\_for\\_war\\_resisters.htm](http://www.umc.org/site/c.gjJTJbMUIuE/b.1802107/k.B1E4/Tacoma_congregation_declares_sanctuary_for_war_resisters.htm), 14 May 2009

<sup>29</sup> *Schritte auf dem Weg des Friedens. Ein Beitrag des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*, EKD-Texte 48, 1994 (3rd edition 2001), art. 2f-g; [www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44654.html](http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44654.html), 13 May 2009; *Episcopal Church's View*; [www.episcopalchurch.org/50917\\_51075\\_ENG\\_HTM.htm?menupage=51074](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/50917_51075_ENG_HTM.htm?menupage=51074), 04.05.2009; *Youth in Military Service*, [www.episcopalchurch.org/50917\\_51107\\_ENG\\_HTM.htm?menupage=51106](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/50917_51107_ENG_HTM.htm?menupage=51106), 04.05.2009; O. Clément , *The Orthodox Church and Peace – Some Reflections*, Milano 1991, in: „*For the Peace from Above*“. *An Orthodox Resource Book on War, Peace and Nationalism*, Bialystok, Poland, Syndesmos, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth (ed.), Orthdruk Printing House, 1999, 176.

<sup>30</sup> Although the Orthodox church tradition does not include a theory of just war, defensive wars and wars of liberation have been permitted as a lesser evil. Ibid., 175-176; Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon, „Exorcising War“, in: *For the Peace from Above: An Orthodox Resource Book on War, Peace and Nationalism*, Bialystok, Poland, Syndesmos, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth (ed.), Orthdruck Printing House, 1999, 158.

2008, sets a goal of “achieving an ecumenical consensus on ways Christians might advocate, together, to replace violence as a means to resolve serious conflict in society.”

Skepticism towards the theory of just war has deep roots in the positions of the WCC.<sup>31</sup> While member churches have advocated humanitarian projects that may have included armed liberation, for instance in Southern Africa during the apartheid struggle, they also condemned war firmly, for example, calling war “a sin against God” at the first Assembly shortly after World War II and advocating living “without resort to arms” during the Cold War. The 1990 JPIC convocation in Seoul emphasized the “overcoming of the institution of war as a means to resolve conflicts”<sup>32</sup>. Since 1994 the WCC through the Programme and then Decade to Overcome Violence supports non-violent alternatives to war to build a culture of just peace. In that perspective the way of peace-building is to give priority to non-military instruments in order to facilitate protection and peace.<sup>33</sup> The 2006 Assembly plenary on *Overcoming Violence: Living a culture of peace* stated: “We will reject every attempt to use violence and fear as tools of politics”<sup>34</sup> and “Peace-building in non-violent ways is a Christian core virtue and an imperative of the gospel message itself.”<sup>35</sup> It is also in this spirit that the WCC has positioned itself on the emerging norm known as Responsibility to Protect, warning against the militarization of humanitarian missions and against using humanitarian need as a pretext for armed intervention.

Biblical foundations. The ethical behind the Decade to Overcome Violence are the teachings of Jesus Christ, especially in the Sermon on the Mount: The merciful, the peacemakers and the persecuted are blessed in the beatitudes. Jesus teaches love for one’s enemies and advises going of a second mile as a non-violent form of protest (Matt. 5). Christ’s death on the cross is the symbol of this kind of resistance, a provocation without force to the mighty. When he is arrested, Jesus forbids his disciple to defend him with the sword (Matt. 26: 25).<sup>36</sup>

In the light of this gospel the WCC and a range of member churches state with increasing clarity that war can not be theologically justified.<sup>37</sup> Advocating for the right of conscientious objection

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<sup>31</sup> *Now is the Time: Final Documents & Other Texts, World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, Seoul 1990; revised version, Geneva 1990, 27.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>33</sup> *The Responsibility to Protect: Ethical and Theological Reflections*, CCIA report to the WCC Central Committee meeting in 2003, Geneva, July 2003; *Responsibility to Protect. The World Council of Churches’ Perspective in Context*, G. Kerber, May 2008. Further information: *The Responsibility to Protect. Ethical and Theological Reflections*, Geneva, S. Asfaw/G. Kerber/ P. Weiderud (ed.), 21-23 April 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Plenary “Overcoming Violence: Living a Culture of Peace”. Mid-Term of the Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2010: Churches seeking reconciliation and Peace. Call to recommitment, September 2005, in: *God, in your Grace: Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva, WCC publications, 2007, 237.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> “Biblical and ethical reflections on nonviolence”, cf. M. Kässmann, *Overcoming Violence. The Challenge to the Churches in All Places*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1998 (revised, 2nd edition 2000), 26-29; Margot Käßmann, *Gewalt überwinden: eine Dekade des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen*, Hannover, Lutherisches Verlagshaus GmbH, 2000, 48-51.

<sup>37</sup> *Now is the Time: Final Documents & Other Texts, World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*. Seoul 1990, revised version, Geneva 1990, 27.



to military service is then only being consistent.<sup>38</sup> Even when objection is not permitted by legislation certain churches call it a “duty of Christians to put the cross above the flag”<sup>39</sup> and to “obey God rather than men”<sup>40, 41</sup>

The WCC position on the right of conscientious objection to military service also links biblical precepts with certain standards set by international human rights law. The WCC affirms “that human rights are God-given and that their promotion and protection are essential for freedom, justice and peace.”<sup>42</sup> Human rights are to be defended, because God created man and women in God’s image (Gen. 1:26; 9:6). Human lives are of an indestructible value and unalienable dignity, affirmed by God’s blessings (Gen. 1:28), and protected by God’s commandments (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 20:12-17). Thus, the human right of freedom of conscience can be interpreted as respecting the dignity of each person, whilst the right to object to serve in the military can be seen an expression of esteem for God-given human life.

## **II. UN and national approaches to conscientious objection**

This section is based mainly on the reports of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights in 2006<sup>43</sup> and 2008<sup>44</sup> with supplementary information from War Resisters International (WRI)<sup>45</sup>, publications of the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO)<sup>46</sup> and interviews with WCC and member church representatives.<sup>47</sup>

Complex differences. Even in secular terms, conscientious objection to military service is a complex issue. In one common scenario, conscientious objection is an individual decision to object to fighting and to the use of a weapon. The individual may accept the army as necessary,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 29; *On Conscientious Objection and Military Service*, June 2004, statement of the US Decade to Overcome Violence Committee.

<sup>39</sup> 1934 General Convention, cit. in: [www.episcopalchurch.org/50917\\_51107\\_ENG\\_HTM.htm?menupage=51106](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/50917_51107_ENG_HTM.htm?menupage=51106), 13 May 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Acts 5: 29, cit. in the Statement of the Church of Brethren on War, 1970.

<sup>41</sup> “The United Methodist Church & Peace” 1968 General Conference and General Conference resolution 318, *The United Methodist Church & Peace*; [http://gbgm-umc.org/global\\_news/full\\_article.cfm?articleid=1405](http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news/full_article.cfm?articleid=1405), 13 May 2009; *Now is the Time. Final Documents & Other Texts. World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*. Seoul 1990, revised version, Geneva 1990, 27; the Roman Catholic Church shares this opinion: cf. *Compendium to his Holiness Pope John Paul II Master of Social Doctrine and Evangelical Witness to Justice and Peace*, art. 399.

<sup>42</sup> *Now is the Time: Final Documents & Other Texts, World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, Seoul 1990; revised version, Geneva 1990, 21.

<sup>43</sup> *Civil and Political Rights, Including the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service*, 27 February 2006 - E/CN.4/2006/51.

<sup>44</sup> Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on conscientious objection to military service, 20 August 2008 – A/HRC/9/24.

<sup>45</sup> [www.wri-irg.org](http://www.wri-irg.org) 13 May 2009.

<sup>46</sup> [www.quno.org](http://www.quno.org) 13 May 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Important supplementary information is indicated by the endnotes.

but is not willing to participate personally. In a second scenario, conscientious objection may refer to the whole military system and the refusal to participate in it.

Furthermore the principle of conscience is defined in different ways: In Western Europe and North America objectors often maintain that their conscience forbids them from taking human life, even in wartime. In Latin America young men refuse to serve in the armed forces because they do not support the brutality within the military itself, regardless of war. They cannot bear becoming part of a system which disregards human rights and oppresses indigenous people.

In Israel and the United States some soldiers refuse to serve only in certain wars. Their conviction is that military actions such as Gaza (2009) or Iraq (2003-?) cannot be morally justified. The UN term for them is “selective conscientious objectors”.<sup>48</sup>

Increasing recognition. There is a general tendency for governments to recognize conscientious objection in law and in practice, according to the two UN reports. Among the states offering alternative non-combatant or civilian service to conscientious objectors are 18 European countries, USA, Mexico, Tunisia, Russia and Armenia. Adding to this trend, 18 mostly European states have suspended or ended compulsory military service altogether since 1995: Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Peru, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Slovenia, Georgia, Morocco, Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Lebanon, Romania and Ukraine.

Nevertheless, serious problems remain, for example, in South Korea, Israel, Eritrea and Turkey, where conscientious objectors face discrimination, are prosecuted, punished and often sent to prison. Such practices are condemned by the United Nation<sup>49</sup>.

Despite recognition of conscientious objection, some countries are not in compliance with UN standards. One example is having time limits on applying for conscientious objector status. In 18 of 29 European countries with conscription programmes, objection is recognized only before military service begins. Only seven European states allow people serving in the military or reservists to apply for objector status.

A small number of states including Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States recognize the right to conscientious objection among soldiers who volunteered to serve in the armed forces. These few states recognize that convictions of conscience may alter after the entry into the army.

Selective objection. *Selective* conscientious objection to a certain war is rarely recognized. Whereas US military personnel who signed up voluntarily may apply for general conscientious

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<sup>48</sup> It shall be mentioned that there are more good reasons to refuse military service than reasons of conscience. In Sudan for example young people tried to evade the conscription during the civil war (1983-2005), because they feared for their own life. They knew that they would be sent to the frontline directly after military service and probably be killed. In their horror of the war they did not reflect on principles of conscience any more.

<sup>49</sup> Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/77 states that States should “not (...) discriminate amongst conscientious objectors on the basis of their particular beliefs” and calls upon governments to “refrain from subjecting conscientious objectors to imprisonment and to repeated punishment for failure to perform military service.”

objector status, several of them have recently been prosecuted as deserters for specifically objecting to service in Iraq or in Afghanistan. Many US war resisters flee to Canada with their families and ask for a refugee status. Although the UN encourages states to grant asylum to persecuted conscientious objectors<sup>50</sup>, in Canada they are faced with deportation, imprisonment back in the United States and, according to one church group, having their children taken away.<sup>51</sup>

Israel is another current example of selective conscientious objection – in the case of conscripts doing Israel’s compulsory military service. Many of the Israeli objectors are not against the army in general but against the occupation of the Palestinian territory and involvement of the military in house demolitions and harassment of the Palestinian population. In recent years the “refusenik” movement of conscientious objectors has increased.<sup>52</sup> Like males, Israeli Jewish women are recruited at the age of 17. Resisters are often still teenagers when they face their first prison term. Many objectors are repeatedly punished, which is not in compliance with United Nations standards.<sup>53</sup>

In many countries it is not sufficient only to claim conscientious objection, but it is required to prove the integrity of one’s conviction in a personal interview.<sup>54</sup> This was the case in Switzerland, but the practice was dropped in 2009. Performing alternative civilian service 1.5 times longer than military service was deemed to be sufficient proof of the objector’s motivation.

Forms of alternative service. Estonia, Finland, Greece and Moldavia have been condemned by the European Committee on Social Rights for their “excessively long periods of alternative service”. UN standards are that civilian service 1.7 times the length of military service is punitive<sup>55</sup>.

The United Nations analytical report criticizes practices which limit conscientious objector status only to certain religious denominations or to people who object for religious reasons. Also, this

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<sup>50</sup> Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/77; The United Nations analytical report of 2006 makes it clear, that the asylum offer shall also apply to selective conscientious objectors „avoiding participation in an internationally condemned war involving conduct contrary to international law.“

<sup>51</sup> “Auf der Flucht vor Amerika,” by A. Heide, in: *Die Zeit*, number 17, 20 April 2006; [www.zeit.de/2006/17/US-Deserteure\\_17](http://www.zeit.de/2006/17/US-Deserteure_17), 16 May 2009; “Open Letter to the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada”, by the Mennonite Central Committee Canada, the Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers) and the United Church of Canada, 19 March 2009; <http://mcc.org/canada/ottawa/rivera%20letter.pdf>, 13 May 2009.

<sup>52</sup> The movement is also called *Courage to Refuse*: [www.couragetorefuse.org/english/default.asp](http://www.couragetorefuse.org/english/default.asp), 13 May 2009; especially the young objectors take part in the network “Shministim”.

<sup>53</sup> Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/77 states that „no one shall be liable or punished again for an offence for which he has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with the law and penal procedure of each country“.

<sup>54</sup> Acceptance without enquiry in its purest way can only be stated for Paraguay. In other countries, such as Finland (and Sweden), the reckless disregard of the consequences of a longer civilian service replaces the enquiry. Cf. *Military recruitment and Conscientious Objection: A Thematic Global Survey*, by D. Brett, Conscience and Peace Tax International (ed.), 2005, 71; In 16 of 34 examined states an enquiry normally takes place or can take place. *Ibid.*, 72-74.

<sup>55</sup> Civil and Political Rights, Including the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service, 27 February 2006 - E/CN.4/2006/51, 14; Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on conscientious objection to military service, 20 August 2008 – A/HRC/9/24, 4.

WCC study found no church that supports the right to conscientious objection exclusively for religious reasons. According to a Quaker organization<sup>56</sup> in Europe, that it is generally the national Ministry of Defense which decides on the validity of non-religious claims of conscientious objection.

The UN Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/77 calls upon states to offer alternative service of a “non-combatant or civilian character”. For example, 18 European countries offer civilian service outside the armed forces, while some other European states allow civilian or non-combatant military service.<sup>57</sup> In Cuba substitute service is only possible within the structure of the army.<sup>58</sup> This was also the case in Ecuador until 2007 when a court ruled that any alternative service within the armed forces was irreconcilable with conscientious objection.

Military service can be avoided by paying a tax in some countries, including Albania, Ecuador, Georgia, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Bolivia. In Bolivia, where military service has been known for brutality, families put money together to buy an expensive military booklet that exempts their sons. But buying a booklet is not an option for poor families. This study was not able to clarify whether conscientious objectors also have to pay the tax, but in 2005, Alfredo Diaz, a Jehovah’s Witness appealed to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and reached a settlement with the Bolivian government including his exemption from the military tax.<sup>59</sup>

In Switzerland the tax has to be paid in addition to doing civilian service.

The UN report calls attention to exceptions to the general trends in favor of granting conscientious objection, including:

- The Republic of Korea has the largest numbers of imprisoned conscientious objectors in the world – about 700 each year.<sup>60</sup> Most of them are Jehovah’s Witnesses. Plans for alternative civilian service were stopped in 2007, but political debate of the issue raised public awareness and the number of non-Jehovah’s Witness objectors increased.
- In South Korea, Cuba and Israel, public support for universal military service is linked to national perceptions of external threats. However, the government of Israel told the United Nations Human Rights Council recently it would begin promoting the right of conscientious objection and providing alternative service options.
- In Eritrea the number of conscientious objectors within the army increased after the border war with Ethiopia in the late 1990s. Since 2002, all students including females are forced to finish their 12<sup>th</sup> year of school at a military base. There are persistent reports of violence against conscripts and especially against women, reprisals for refusing to have sex with

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<sup>56</sup> *The Right to Conscientious Objection in Europe: A Review of the Current Situation*, Quaker Council for European Affairs, Brussels, April 2005; [www.quaker.org/qcea/coreport](http://www.quaker.org/qcea/coreport), 20 May 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> This is a general practice, although it is not guaranteed by legislation. Cf. Interview with Dr. Reinerio Arce, moderator of the Senate of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba.

<sup>59</sup> The tax as a substitute to military service is not to be confounded with the refuse of some members of the historic peace churches to pay the part of taxes of the general income which is assigned for the military.

<sup>60</sup> [www.wri-irg.org/news/2004/korea04-en.htm](http://www.wri-irg.org/news/2004/korea04-en.htm), 19 May 2009.

commanders, suicides among conscripts, Eritreans becoming refugees to avoid military service, relatives imprisoned for allegedly helping the fugitives, and preventive arrests of draft-age youth. The UN has called on states to grant refugee status to conscientious objectors from Eritrea.

### **III. Church responses to the challenge of conscientious objection**

The churches commitment to advocate for a universal right of conscientious objection to military service has strengthened during the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence. The central call is for all governments to recognize the status of conscientious objectors. In addition to public statements of commitment, many churches offer practical help for conscientious objectors and intercede on their behalf.

Churches use resolutions, open letters, pastoral letters, reports, minutes, periodicals, press releases and news on church homepages. A statement by the US DOV Committee is one<sup>61</sup> of many such actions among WCC member churches. Church positions generally are in agreement with the United Nations analytical report of 2006, as discussed above.

In addition, some churches take up issues of amnesty for war resisters, refusal to pay or exemption from the portion of their income taxes that supports their country's military or the establishment of an alternative "Peace Tax". Such position are found in the historic peace churches, the United Church of Canada, and the WCC<sup>62</sup>. The question of child soldiers is only rarely addressed in the context of conscientious objection,<sup>63</sup> this study found.

The Mennonite Church, Quaker organizations (Friends World Committee for Consultation, American Friends Service Committee, Quaker Peace and Social Witness, and Quaker United Nations Office) and Pax Christi International are examples of groups with an international commitment to support conscientious objectors. Quakers and Pax Christi work closely with the United Nations and have UN Economic and Social Council status like the WCC Churches Commission on International Affairs.

In most cases, church-related support for conscientious objectors is local. Practical assistance generally consists in counseling persons affected by military service. Some provide sanctuaries for conscientious objectors; others mount campaigns to support their rights. The active groups are not necessarily established churches, but church-related associations which are often

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<sup>61</sup> "On Conscientious Objection and Military Service," June 2004, statement of the US Decade to Overcome Violence Committee.

<sup>62</sup> "United Church Social Policy Positions. Conscientious Objection and Policy Taxes," 1992; [www.united-church.ca/beliefs/policies/1992/c513](http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/policies/1992/c513), 20 May 2009; Statement of the Church of Brethren on War, 1970; [www.cobannualconference.org/ac\\_statements/70War.htm](http://www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/70War.htm), 20 May 2009; "Resolution on Conscientious Objection to Military Taxes (Mennonite Church), 1983", [www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/R486.html](http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/R486.html), 20 May 2009; "Committee on Conscientious Objection to Paying for War" Quakers, New York Yearly Meeting, 2009; *Now is the Time: Final Documents & Other Texts, World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, Seoul 1990; revised version, Geneva 1990, 29.

<sup>63</sup> The only example found in this study: "Conscientious Objection to Military Service", statement by Pax Christi International, 1997.

ecumenical. Individual Christians also participate in civil society peace-networks that are action-oriented. Some examples of local church responses follow.

North America. This study found the largest number of church initiatives in support of conscientious objectors in Canada and the USA. Also, of all local churches contacted for this study, North American churches provided the most information. This is an indicator that DOV's objective to speak out for the right of conscientious objection meets their interests, although the issue is contested certain conservative churches.

Many denominations have peace fellowships which take a stand from their churches' point of view but with an increased emphasis on peace and nonviolence. They provide practical and sometimes ethical and biblical information and advice. The general aim is to persuade young people not to register for the army and to encourage soldiers to consider conscientious objection. There are (in alphabetical order) Adventist, Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Orthodox and Presbyterian Peace Fellowships.<sup>64</sup> There is a Mennonite Church USA Peace & Justice Support Network and the Roman Catholic-related Pax Christi USA.

These ministries include an association for conscientious objectors<sup>65</sup>, a legal counseling service near three US military bases, a toll-free telephone hotline for soldiers trying to leave the military<sup>66</sup> and a Centre of Conscience and War that offers inter-religious counseling<sup>67</sup>. In one parish-level example, a United Methodist Congregation in Tacoma, Washington, surrounded by military bases, provides a sanctuary and essential information for soldiers with moral qualms about taking part in the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>68</sup>

In Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Mennonite Church, the United Church of Canada and the Quakers support US war resisters who ask for asylum. These churches provide sanctuary including protection and practical help. They write open letters to the government requesting recognition for war resisters as refugees.<sup>69</sup>

Europe. For more than 50 years the German Protestant Association for the Care of Conscientious Objectors (EAK) has advised young men confronted by the decision between military and civilian service.<sup>70</sup> Every established Protestant church of the EKD has

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<sup>64</sup> Further information: [www.adventistpeace.org](http://www.adventistpeace.org); [www.catholicpeacefellowship.org](http://www.catholicpeacefellowship.org); [www.episcopalpeacefellowship.org](http://www.episcopalpeacefellowship.org); [www.lutheranpeace.net](http://www.lutheranpeace.net); [www.peace.mennolink.org](http://www.peace.mennolink.org); [www.incommunion.org](http://www.incommunion.org); [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org); [www.presbypeacefellowship.org](http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org).

<sup>65</sup> [www.epfnational.org/digital\\_faith/dfcfiles/185](http://www.epfnational.org/digital_faith/dfcfiles/185)

<sup>66</sup> Further information: [www.quakerhouse.org/Defaul-oldt.html](http://www.quakerhouse.org/Defaul-oldt.html)

<sup>67</sup> Further information: [www.centeronconscience.org](http://www.centeronconscience.org)

<sup>68</sup> "Tacoma congregation declares sanctuary for war resisters," by P. Jeffrey, 20 June 2006; [www.umc.org/site/c.gjJTJbMUIuE/b.1802107/k.B1E4/Tacoma\\_congregation\\_declares\\_sanctuary\\_for\\_war\\_resisters.htm](http://www.umc.org/site/c.gjJTJbMUIuE/b.1802107/k.B1E4/Tacoma_congregation_declares_sanctuary_for_war_resisters.htm), 22 May 2009.

<sup>69</sup> One example: "Open Letter to the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada," by the Mennonite Central Committee Canada, the Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers) and the United Church of Canada, 19 March 2009; <http://mcc.org/canada/ottawa/rivera%20letter.pdf>, 22 May 2009.

<sup>70</sup> Further information: [www.eak-online.de](http://www.eak-online.de)



commissioners for conscientious objection and civil service. There is also a chaplaincy service for conscientious objectors and serving conscripts. Future pastors and priests are exempt from conscription.

The Mennonite-supported Military Counseling Network assists US soldiers stationed in Germany, Iraq and South Korea.<sup>71</sup> From 2003 to 2005 the MCN assisted more than 20 soldiers in Germany and Iraq to apply for conscientious objector status but most applications were denied.<sup>72</sup> One German NGO is currently preparing a report on conscientious objection to military taxes and German church positions on the issue.<sup>73</sup>

In Switzerland, church groups especially the Mennonites<sup>74</sup> participate in a network called Schweizerisches Zivildienstkommittee/Swiss Civilian Service Committee, which provides counseling to people applying for or doing their civil service and lobbies the parliament in Bern. Individual clergy and church members also participate in networks as Groupe pour une Suisse sans armée<sup>75</sup>, Church and Peace<sup>76</sup> and the DOV. In 2007 the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland advocated that civilian service be reduced to 1.3 the time of the military service.<sup>77</sup> In 2009 Swiss Quakers sent an open letter to the government requesting the recognition of refugee status for conscientious objectors from abroad.

During the Balkan wars of the 1990s, leaders of Pentecostal churches, the Church of the Nazarene, the Seventh Day Adventists and the Baptist churches in Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia encouraged conscientious objection. During the communist period in Hungary, most male members of the BOKOR<sup>78</sup> movement were conscientious objectors and spent time in prison.

Other regions. In other parts of the world it is generally difficult for churches to speak out on this issue. This is especially true where the majority of the society does not support conscientious objection, the notion of conscientious objection or civilian disobedience is not widespread, or where the state system depends on military support.

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<sup>71</sup> Further information: [www.getting-out.de](http://www.getting-out.de)

<sup>72</sup> [www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/news2005/0222-15.htm](http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/news2005/0222-15.htm), 30 April 2009.

<sup>73</sup> The title will be: *Militärsteuer-Verweigerung und Kirchen in Deutschland – Kirchliche Reaktionen und Positionen zur Absicht der Militärsteuer-Verweigerung*; available on the internet from June onward; foreseen links: [www.netzwerk-friedenssteuer.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=71&Itemid=105](http://www.netzwerk-friedenssteuer.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=71&Itemid=105); <http://cpti.ws> – here under rubric CPTI Documents.

<sup>74</sup> The engagement of the Swiss Mennonite B. Sägesser is one example: B. Sägesser, *Zivildienst – Ein Engagement / Service civil- un engagement / Servizio civile – Un impegno*, in: *Zivildienst – Ein Zeitzeuge / Service civil – un témoin / Servizio civile – una testimonianza*, Bern, Gemeinschaft Schweizerischer Zivildienstleistender (ed.), 2002 (2nd edition 2006), 15-20.

<sup>75</sup> Further information: [www.gssa.ch/spip](http://www.gssa.ch/spip)

<sup>76</sup> Further information: [www.church-and-peace.org](http://www.church-and-peace.org)

<sup>77</sup> „Vernehmlassung zur Revision des Zivildienstgesetzes und des Bundesgesetzes über die Wehrpflichtabgabe“, SEK – FEPS, 1st October 2007; [www.sek-feps.ch/media/pdf/stellungnahme/Zivildienst\\_SEK07\\_final-d.pdf](http://www.sek-feps.ch/media/pdf/stellungnahme/Zivildienst_SEK07_final-d.pdf) 22 May 2009.

<sup>78</sup> BOKOR refers to the burning bush and is the name of a Catholic grassroots movement committed to bible study, unconditional love, nonviolence and social action. See also [www.bocs.hu](http://www.bocs.hu)

In Israel, Korea and Columbia church-affiliated organizations support conscientious objectors. Pax Christi is present in Israel and the Korean Anabaptist Center<sup>79</sup> counsels objectors and visits imprisoned objectors. In Columbia, the Fellowship of Reconciliation<sup>80</sup> focuses on conscientious objection among young people and the Mennonite organization Justapaz carries out education in non-violence and peace-building and advocates for alternative civilian service.

There is little information available on African churches and the subject of conscientious objection. Research indicates that issues of child soldiers, food supplies and HIV/Aids prevention take precedence in countries in conflict, as do church-related actions for peace, non-violence and reconciliation. A church leader in Madagascar recently urged Christians in the military not to commit acts of violence<sup>81</sup>, in Sudan's long civil war pastors were tortured for speaking out against forced conscription and child soldiers, and churches in many countries have played key roles in truth and reconciliation processes, in reintegrating former combatants and in weapons collections programs.

In Armenia and Turkmenistan, all conscientious objectors belonged to the Jehovah's Witnesses – 80 people in Armenia alone.<sup>82</sup> They receive some support on-line from Forum 18 News Service, a Christian-related web and email initiative to provide reporting and analysis on violations of religious freedom, notably in Belarus and Central Asia. The name Forum 18 refers to Article 18 on religious freedom in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The forum also addresses human rights requests to government officials and seeks discussion with them.

In Latin-America, there appear to be reservations in regard to the issue of conscientious objection. Attitudes have to be interpreted in their regional political and cultural context. In Cuba about ten years ago three parliamentarians, who were Presbyterian pastors, started a lively discussion about the necessity for a legal guarantee of the right of conscientious objection. They were informed that in spite of the lack of legislation, in practice conscientious objectors were already offered alternative service within the armed forces – for example, in agriculture and office work. In the end the parliamentarians accepted this existing practice, because they feared a misuse of the legal right to conscientious objection. This form of alternative service reportedly remains in place.

The Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba maintains a programme for Swiss conscientious objectors to participate in the Cuban alternative service explained above. One or two Swiss conscripts each year avail themselves of this opportunity.

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<sup>79</sup> Further information: <http://en.kac.or.kr/home>

<sup>80</sup> Further information: [www.forusa.org](http://www.forusa.org)

<sup>81</sup> This was reported by Ekklesia, 18 March 2009; [www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/8989](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/8989) 28 May 2009.

<sup>82</sup> "Turkmenistan: Will the state respect everyone's right to conscientious objection?" by F. Corley, 31 July 2008; [www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1166](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1166), 27 May 2009; „Turkmenistan: Conscientious objector convicted as criminal“, 20 April 2009; [www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1285](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1285), 27 May 2009; „Armenia: Imprisonment of some 80 conscientious objectors not a human rights issue“, by F. Corley; [www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1228](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1228), 27 May 2009.



In Bolivia, there are increasing voices in public advocating for civilian service as an alternative to military service. Many individual Christians support these calls, especially feminists, one source noted. Established churches, however, generally do not support conscientious objectors – reportedly because they are working with the government to promote a reform of the army. The Methodist Church provides classrooms and teachers for an education campaign for poor children organized by the military. Another reason for the position of Bolivian churches is cultural. In indigenous culture military service is an important rite of passage. When adolescents come back from the army, they are considered to be adult men. Therefore, conscientious objectors risk being marginalized in society.

#### IV. Observations, perspectives and recommendations

One of the key objectives of the DOV is to challenge the global trend toward militarization which constitutes an important aspect of violence. The DOV's basic framework states that violence, and therefore also war, cannot be justified in the light of the teachings of Jesus Christ. It sets out an explicit goal to encourage churches to relinquish any theological justification of violence. Surely this also includes state or military violence. This discernment is a first step in the process to overcome violence.

The conviction to not carry or use a weapon is to be understood as an ideal. It does not imply condemnation of persons who serve as soldiers to defend their people and their families. In her book on the Decade to Overcome Violence, Margot Käßmann, the Lutheran Bishop of Hannover and one of the early promoters of the Decade, appeals for humbleness among advocates of non-violence: “We shall have in mind that nobody knows if he or she would have the strength to resist the use of violence in extreme situations.”<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless the DOV takes the stand that even if there might be ethical or political reasons, fighting a war cannot be justified in the light of the gospel. As illustrated above, an increasing tendency among churches can be observed to dissociate from the classical theory of just war. Yet, in spite of the Decade, no general consensus has been reached on whether the use of military force is justifiable and can be defended for Christians. As part of this process of discernment, WCC member churches should be encouraged to focus on the issue of conscientious objection.

This study shows that:

- Numerous church initiatives exist in support of conscientious objectors – most of them in the North America and Western Europe.
- Attention by churches to the challenges of conscientious objection is needed in many places.
- Churches that did not take a stand on the issue, as far as we know, do not speak *against* conscientious objection.
- Among churches who advocate in favor of conscientious objection, controversy remains. The Historic Peace Churches refuse to participate in the military in all circumstances. In the other churches, the point of view is that both civilian service and military service may be Christian options.

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<sup>83</sup> M. Käßmann, *Overcoming Violence. The Challenge to the Churches in All Places*, Genva, WCC Publications, 1998 (revised, 2nd edition 2000), 28-29; M. Käßmann, *Gewalt überwinden: eine Dekade des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen*, Hannover, Lutherisches Verlagshaus GmbH, 2000, 51-53.

- This study suggests that a consensus might be reached to advocate the right of conscientious objection. Everybody who feels that he or she cannot bear weapons for religious or other reasons of conscience should have the possibility to object without being submitted to discrimination or punishment.

Therefore it seems appropriate for the WCC to once again advocate for the right of conscientious objection to military service. To do so would be a witness for justice and against violence in numerous countries today, would carry out a recommendation placed on the international ecumenical agenda by the World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in Seoul 30 years ago, and would contribute to the international rule of law defined in part by International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights six decades ago.

In speaking out for the right of conscientious objection, the WCC could speak out for churches whose voices may not be heard on this issue, for example, in Sudan. It would encourage churches in different countries to become more engaged for conscientious objection together. Churches and related ministries have proved they are able to prevent the marginalization and discrimination which conscientious objectors in many countries suffer. Inasmuch as the Bible calls us to abandon violence, churches have an obligation to support conscientious objectors who are in trouble for following biblical teachings. Often objectors are very young when they refuse to go into the army. In many places this takes much strength and courage.

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*The research on conscientious objection is a work in progress. If you have further information on the situation in your country or about your church please write to [DOV@wcc-coe.org](mailto:DOV@wcc-coe.org), with the subject header "Conscientious Objection Study". Thank you for your cooperation.*

*The resources for this study can be consulted at the DOV office of the WCC, 150 route de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 2. Certain references are taken from the WCC's archives. Special thanks are due to Angela Schnepel, DOV intern from March to July 2009, who worked diligently to research and write the first draft this study document.*

## Useful Resources

### Books and articles

Clément, O: *The Orthodox Church and Peace – Some Reflections*, Milano 1991, in: „*For the Peace from Above*“. *An Orthodox Resource Book on War, Peace and Nationalism*, Bialystok, Poland, Syndesmos, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth (ed.), Orthdruck Printing House, 1999.

Gibble, H.L.: *The World Council of Churches and the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service*, in: *European Churches and Conscientious Objection to Military Service. A contribution to the conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Proceedings of an international conference held at Loccum, 25 to 28 September 1989*, Bremen, German Protestant Association for the Care of Conscientious Objectors (EAK, ed.), 1991, 11-27.

Kässmann, M.: *Overcoming Violence. The Challenge to the Churches in All Places*, Genva, WCC Publications, 1998 (revised, 2nd edition 2000), 26-29; Margot Käßmann, *Gewalt überwinden: eine Dekade des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen*, Hannover, Lutherisches Verlagshaus GmbH, 2000, 48-51.

Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon: *Exorcising War*, in: „*For the Peace from Above*“. *An Orthodox Resource Book on War, Peace and Nationalism*, Bialystok, Poland, Syndesmos, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth (ed.), Orthdruck Printing House, 1999.

Simion, Gh. M.: „Polegomena to a Peace Studies Model for Eastern Christianity“, in: *Journal of the American Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Simion, Gh. M. (ed.) Vol. 2005-2009, No.29-33, 2009, 81-90.

*The Responsibility to Protect. Ethical and Theological Reflections*, Geneva, S. Asfaw/G. Kerber/ P. Weiderud (ed.), 21-23 April 2005.

*Zivildienst – Ein Zeuge / Service civil – un témoin / Servizio civile – una testimonianza*, Bern, Gemeinschaft Schweizerischer Zivildienstleistender (ed.), 2002 (2nd edition 2006).

### Reports, pastoral reflections and WCC declarations

*Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on conscientious objection to military service*, 20 August 2008 – A/HRC/9/24.

*Civil and Political Rights, Including the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service. Analytical report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on best practices in relation to conscientious objection to military service*, 27 February 2006 - E/CN.4/2006/51.

*European Churches and Conscientious Objection to Military Service. A Contribution to the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, Bremen, Evangelische Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Betreuung der Kriegsdienstverweigerer (EAK, ed.), 1991.

*Military Recruitment and Conscientious Objection: A Thematic Global Survey*, by D. Brett, Conscience and Peace Tax International (ed.), 2005.

*Now is the Time. Final Documents & Other Texts. World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Seoul 1990*, revised version, Geneva 1990, 29.

*On Conscientious Objection and Military Service*, June 2004, statement of the US Decade to Overcome Violence Committee.

Plenary "Overcoming Violence: Living a Culture of Peace". *Mid-Term of the Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2010: Churches seeking reconciliation and Peace. Call to recommitment*, September 2005, in: *God, in your Grace... Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (ed.)*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2007, 237.

*Statement on the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service*, 1973, in: *The Churches in International Affairs. Reports 1970-1973*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1974, 136.

*The Right to Conscientious Objection in Europe: A Review of the Current Situation*, Quaker Council for European Affairs, Brussels, April 2005.

## **Web-Links**

*Auf der Flucht vor Amerika*, by A. Heide, in: *Die Zeit*, number 17, 20 April 2006; [www.zeit.de/2006/17/US-Deserteure\\_17](http://www.zeit.de/2006/17/US-Deserteure_17), access 16 May 2009.

*Militärsteuer-Verweigerung und Kirchen in Deutschland – Kirchliche Reaktionen und Positionen zur Absicht der Militärsteuer-Verweigerung*; available on the internet from June onward; links: [www.netzwerk-friedenssteuer.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=71&Itemid=105](http://www.netzwerk-friedenssteuer.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=71&Itemid=105); <http://cpti.ws> – here under rubric CPTI Documents.

*Orthodox Christians and Conscientious Objection*, by J. Forest, 12 September 2008; <http://incommunion.org/articles/essays/orthodox-christians-and-conscientious-objection>, access 22 May 2009.

*Schritte auf dem Weg des Friedens. Ein Beitrag des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*, EKD-Texte 48, 1994 (3rd edition 2001), art. 4b; [www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44654.html](http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44654.html), 13 May 2009.

## **Organizations dealing with conscientious objection to military service**

American Friends Service Committee: [www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)

Adventist Peace Fellowship: [www.adventistpeace.org](http://www.adventistpeace.org)

Campaign for Conscientious Objection in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Kampanja za progovor savjesti u Bosni I Hercegovini): [www.prigovorbih.org](http://www.prigovorbih.org) (under construction as of 19/08/09)

Catholic Peace Fellowship: [www.catholicpeacefellowship.org](http://www.catholicpeacefellowship.org)

Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO) [www.objector.org](http://www.objector.org)

Centre on Conscience and War: [www.centeronconscience.org](http://www.centeronconscience.org)

Church and Peace: [www.church-and-peace.org](http://www.church-and-peace.org)

Courage to Refuse: [www.couragetorefuse.org/english/default.asp](http://www.couragetorefuse.org/english/default.asp)

Episcopal Peace Fellowship: [www.episcopalpeacefellowship.org](http://www.episcopalpeacefellowship.org)

European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO): [www.ebco-beoc.eu](http://www.ebco-beoc.eu)

Evangelische Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Betreuung der Kriegsdienstverweigerer (EAK): [www.eak-online.de](http://www.eak-online.de)

Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR): [www.forusa.org](http://www.forusa.org)

Forum 18: [www.forum18.org](http://www.forum18.org)

Friends United Meeting (FUM) Peace Connections Page: [www.fum.org/about/peacepage.htm](http://www.fum.org/about/peacepage.htm)

Groupe pour une Suisse sans armée: [www.gssa.ch/spip](http://www.gssa.ch/spip)

International Fellowship of reconciliation (IFOR): [www.ifor.org](http://www.ifor.org)

Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust: [www.jrct.org.uk](http://www.jrct.org.uk)

Koren Anabaptist Centre (KAC): <http://en.kac.or.kr/home>

Lutheran Peace Fellowship: [www.lutheranpeace.net](http://www.lutheranpeace.net)

Mennonite Central Committee: [www.mcc.org](http://www.mcc.org)

Mennonite Church USA Peace & Justice Support Network: [peace.mennolink.org](http://peace.mennolink.org)

Military Counseling Network (MCN): [www.getting-out.de](http://www.getting-out.de)

Orthodox Peace Fellowship: [www.incommunion.org](http://www.incommunion.org)

Pax Christi USA: [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org)

Pax Christi International (PCI): [www.paxchristi.com](http://www.paxchristi.com)

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship: [www.presbypeacefellowship.org](http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org)

Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA): [www.quaker.org/qcea/index.html](http://www.quaker.org/qcea/index.html)

Quaker House in Fayetteville, USA: [www.quakerhouse.org](http://www.quakerhouse.org)

Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO): [www.quno.org](http://www.quno.org)

Refuser Solidarity Network: [www.refusersolidarity.org](http://www.refusersolidarity.org)

War Resisters International (WRI): [www.wri-irg.org](http://www.wri-irg.org)

War Resisters League: [www.warresisters.org](http://www.warresisters.org)

Woman's International League for Peace and Freedom: [www.peacewomen.org](http://www.peacewomen.org)