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## JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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### **YURII SHELIAZHENKO\*, CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR TO MILITARY SERVICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER, UNDER IMMEDIATE THREAT**

**January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026**

The undersigned organizations express serious concern regarding the continued persecution of Ukrainian human rights defender **Yurii Sheliazenko**, a conscientious objector to military service. **He is currently under an alarming threat of being arrested and forcibly conscripted under Ukraine's system of universal military registration**, which is enforced through coercive measures including arbitrary detentions and forced transfers to conscription offices. Such practices effectively compel conscientious objectors to act against their beliefs and directly violate Article 18(2) of the ICCPR, which prohibits coercion impairing freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

In answer to his appeals against the summon recently received at Christmas time, **Yurii Sheliazenko** was sent a communication from a number of authorities,<sup>1</sup> **all stating in writing that there is not recognition of conscientious objection to military service in Ukraine in times of war**. The Secretariat of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets replied to a related complaint, “mobilization by the State of Ukraine is the only necessary and urgent measure to prevent aggression by another state, during which the possibility of alternative service is excluded (since mobilization itself is aimed not simply at performing military service, but at protecting the Motherland from military invasion by another state). At the same time, the current legislation provides for the liability of persons guilty of violating the legislation on military duty and military service.”

**This violates international standards and constitute a grievous violation of the right of those who refuse to serve in the military on ground of conscience.** Indeed, good practices of provisions related to alternative service during armed conflicts can be traced in the history of other countries.<sup>2</sup>

**Conscientious objection to military service is a human right inherent in article 18 of the ICCPR on freedom of thought, conscience and religion<sup>3</sup> and art. 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**

**According to international human rights law and standards the right to conscientious objection applies both in wartime and in peacetime**, as acknowledged by the Human Rights Committee.<sup>4</sup> Article 4, paragraph 2, of the ICCPR does not permit any derogation from the obligations of a State Party concerning Article 18 on freedom of thought, conscience and religion even in time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation.<sup>5</sup>

According to reports of the United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights and Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner, several conscientious objectors in Ukraine have been already tortured and imprisoned.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Authorities including Mr. Stanislav Kulish -the Director of the Department for Monitoring the Observance of Rights in the Defence Sector and the Rights of Veterans and Military Personnel, Prisoners of War and Their Family Members in the Secretariat of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine-, Colonel Serhii Kalugin -Commander of the Pechersk District Territorial Conscription Centre in Kyiv City- and Mr. Taras Kovalchuk -Deputy Head of Third Investigative Division of the Territorial Directorate of the State Bureau of Investigations Situated in Kyiv City.

<sup>2</sup> “Conscientious objection in time of war and other national emergencies”, EBCO 2024 annual report, pages 199-204. [https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2025-06-05-EBCO\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2024.pdf](https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2025-06-05-EBCO_Annual_Report_2024.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, Communication No. 1642-1741/2007, Jeong et al. v. Republic of Korea (CCPR/C/101/D/1642-1741/2007), 27 April 2011, para. 7.3. <https://juris.ohchr.org/casedetails/1637/en-US>

<sup>4</sup> E.g. CCPR/CO/82/FIN, 2 December 2004, para. 14. <http://undocs.org/CCPR/CO/82/FIN>

<sup>5</sup> See also: Amy Maguire, “Why banning men from leaving Ukraine violates their human rights”, *The Conversation*, 8 March 2022.

<https://theconversation.com/why-banning-men-from-leaving-ukraine-violates-their-human-rights-178411>

And “Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, Public sector guidance sheet”.

<https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/human-rights-and-anti-discrimination/human-rights-scrutiny/public-sector-guidance-sheets/right-freedom-thought-conscience-and-religion-or-belief#can-the-right-to-freedom-of-thought-conscience-and-religion-or-belief-be-limited>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/42nd-periodic-report-human-rights-situation-ukraine-1-december-2024-31> (paras. 85, 86)

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/41st-periodic-report-human-rights-situation-ukraine-1-september-30> (paras. 90, 91)

<https://rm.coe.int/memorandum-on-human-rights-elements-for-peace-in-ukraine-by-michael-o-1680b678ec> (paras. 49, 50)

Violating the right to conscientious objection to military service can also undermine democratic principles that ensure survival of an inclusive society, rather than oppressing a portion of citizens who seek and support, for example, alternatives to warfare in order to establish peace and ensure the well-being of their community.

- **We urge the Ukrainian authority to withdraw from persecuting conscientious objectors in the country and in particular Mr. Sheliazenko** who has been a publicly declared conscientious objector since 1998 and we urge the Government to stop criminalizing those exercising the human right to conscientious objection to military.
- **We urge the Ukrainian authority to withdraw accusation of alleged “justification of Russian aggression” against Mr. Sheliazenko<sup>7</sup> because of his pacifist expressions, in which he called for nonviolent resistance to Russian aggression and condemned it along with all other wars; and to ensure his freedom of expression and rights are protected under Ukrainian laws, in line with international standards.**

The case of Mr. Sheliazenko has been previously included in a **Communication by the Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief**.<sup>8</sup> The case of Mr. Sheliazenko, the communication of the Special Rapporteurs and the response of the Ukrainian authorities were highlighted also by the OHCHR, in its report concerning Conscientious objection to military service, and particularly in the chapter titled **“Refrain from unduly restricting the human rights of those representing or advocating for the rights of conscientious objectors”**.<sup>9</sup> His case has been highlighted also in Amnesty International’s Annual Report 2023/2024.<sup>10</sup>

- **We call on the international community to exercise all proper actions to ensure that human rights defenders and peace activists are not criminalized for their actions for peace and nonviolence; moreover, that the right to conscientious objection is fully implemented in line with international standards and that conscientious objectors are provided with the necessary protection against persecution in their country of origin, also with asylum.**

\* Mr. Sheliazenko is an academic, the executive secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement (member organization of the War resisters International funded in 1921) and a member of the board of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection<sup>11</sup> and of World Beyond War.

***Signing organizations (in alphabetical order)***

**Agir pour la Paix – Belgium**

**Aktive Arbeitslose Österreich – Austria**

**Anglican Pacifist Fellowship**

**Another Development Foundation**

**Artist for Peace - Sweden**

**Aseistakieltyjäliitto - Finland**

**Association of Conscientious Objectors – Greece**

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<sup>7</sup> Mr. Sheliazenko is charged under Article 436-2 (2) of Criminal Code of Ukraine, that provides for punishments up to 5 years in prison and confiscation of property, for sending to President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy a pacifist statement "Peace Agenda for Ukraine and the World" (<https://www.civilni.media/235/>). The statement contains, along with support for UN GA condemnation of Russian aggression, calls to all parties of the armed conflict to respect rights of conscientious objectors, allow them to resist war non-violently, and not demonize the enemy to a degree excluding any negotiations, that in view of prosecution allegedly "justify Russian aggression". Yurii's house was searched, his smartphone and computer seized in 2023, he was under house arrest till February 2024, with a trial -postponed numerous times- continuing till today.

<sup>8</sup> AL UKR 1/2023, 8 November 2023, p. 5-6. <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28562>

<sup>9</sup> A/HRC/56/30, 23 April 2024, para. 45. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/30>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/> p. 385.

<sup>11</sup> <https://ebco-beoc.org/ebcoboard>

Associazione Nazionale Giuristi Democratici – Italy  
Board of Green Alternative e.V.  
BOCS Civilization Planning Foundation – Hungary  
Bottna för Fred ( Bottna for Peace) – Sweden  
Bund für Soziale Verteidigung (Federation for Social Defence)  
Bundesvereinigung Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz e.V. (Federal Association of Victims of Nazi) - Germany  
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament – UK  
Center for Global Nonkilling  
Center for Nonviolent Action, Lausanne – Switzerland  
Center on Conscience & War – USA  
Centre d'Estudis per la pau JM Delàs – Spain  
Church and Peace e.V. (European Ecumenical Peace Network)  
Community of Christ British Isles Mission Centre  
Connection e.V.  
Conscientious Objection Initiative - Cyprus  
Conscientious Objection Watch - Turkiye  
Coordinamento Fiorentino contro il Riammo - Italy  
Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience  
De Nieuwe Vredesbeweging – The Netherlands  
Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft - Vereinigte KriegsdienstgegnerInnen Frankfurt – Germany  
DFG-VK - Germany  
Dhesarme – Brazilian Action for Humanitarian Disarmament  
DiEM25  
European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO)  
Falu FN-förenings styrelse - Sweden  
Falu United Nations Assosiation  
Folk mot DCA - Sweden  
Forum Friedensethik in the Protestant Church of Baden – Germany  
Forum Nord-Sud – Belgium  
Friedensinitiative Hersfeld-Rotenburg  
Friedenszentrum Braunschweig e.V.  
Gewaltfrei Grün e.V. (non-violent green association)  
Global Veterans Peace Network  
Halte aux guerres, halte à la guerre sociale – Belgium

**Independent and Peaceful Australia network**

**Institute of Peace and Law - Ukraine**

**International Peace Bureau**

**Internationale der Kriegsdienstgegner\*innen (IDK)**

**Internationaler Versöhnungsbund - österreichischer Zweig (Austrian branch of IFOR)**

**Internationaler Versöhnungsbund e.V. (German branch of IFOR)**

**Iona Community**

**ISP VIENNA – AbFaNG – Austria**

**Kerk en Vrede – The Netherlands**

**La Acción Colectiva de Objetores y Objadoras de Conciencia (ACOOC) – Colombia**

**Lay Down Your Arms – Norway & Sweden**

**Le Cercle de libre Pensée - Kring voor het Vrije Denken (CLP-KVD)**

**Lex Innocentium 21st Century – Ireland**

**Meeting of Friends of Ukraine**

**MERA25 - Italy**

**Mesarvot - Israel**

**MIR France (French branch of IFOR)**

**Montreal for a World Beyond War**

**Movimento Internazionale della Riconciliazione - MIR Italy (Italian branch of IFOR)**

**Movimento Nonviolento - Italy**

**Netzwerk Friedenssteuer e.V. – Germany**

**No to war - no to NATO**

**Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme – Cameroon**

**Observatorio de Militarismo**

**Our House - Belarus & Lithuania**

**Pax Christi England & Wales**

**Pax Christi Germany**

**Pax Christi Rhein-Main**

**Peace and Social Concerns committee of Ottawa Quakers**

**Post-Soviet Left**

**Presbyterian Peace Fellowship**

**Public Council of the South Coast of the Gulf of Finland**

**Quaker Council for European Affairs**

**Quakers in Flanders**

**Re-Imagining New Communities**

**School of the Americas Watch in Chile (SOAW-Chile)**

**SERAPAZ – México**

**Stop the War Coalition**

**STOP the War Coalition Philippines**

**Stop Wapenhandel - The Netherlands**

**Stoparmy Movement - Russia**

**Sustainable Peace and Development Organization (SPADO)**

**Svenska fredskommitten Göteborg - Sweden**

**Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society – Sweden**

**Swedish Peace Committee**

**The Fellowship of Reconciliation England and Scotland**

**The Peace Committee of The Swedish Society of Friends - Sweden**

**The Peace Institute, Ljubljana - Slovenia**

**The Peace Movement of Orust - Sweden**

**Transnational Institute**

**Ukrainian Pacifist Movement**

**Vrede vzw (Belgian Peace organisation) – Belgium**

**Vredesactie - Belgium**

**Vredesbeweging Pais (Dutch section of War Resisters International)**

**War Resisters International**

**Women Against Nuclear Power – Finland**

**Women for Peace – Finland**

**Women for Peace – Finland**

**World Beyond War**

**World Without War**