



# European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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## OPEN LETTER

### for the release of Turkish conscientious objector and human rights activist Halil Savda

To: President of the Republic of Turkey  
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Brussels, 13 March 2012

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO), I am writing to you to express our grave concern about the case of Turkish conscientious objector and human rights activist Halil Savda and call for his immediate and unconditional release.

On 24 February 2012, Halil Savda was arrested to serve a 100 days sentence for "*alienating the people from the military*", according to Article 318 of Turkish penal code, because on 1 August 2006 he publicly expressed his solidarity with Israeli conscientious objectors Itzik Shabbat and Amir Pastar, who were imprisoned for refusing to participate in Israel's war in Lebanon. In June 2008 Halil Savda received a sentence for this, which was upheld by the Supreme Court of Appeals in November 2010 and communicated to him in February 2011.

EBCO notes that this is not the first time that Halil Savda is imprisoned for reasons of conscience. He has also served a total of 17 months in military prison over a period of five years for his conscientious objection to military service in 2004. In 2008, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention came to the conclusion that these imprisonments were arbitrary (Opinion 16/2008).

EBCO is also deeply concerned because Halil Savda faces another six-month prison sentence for breaching Article 318, handed down in June 2010, which is being considered by the Supreme Court of Appeals, and because there are still other cases pending against him under Article 318.

The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection calls on you to withdraw all charges against Halil Savda, release him immediately and unconditionally and provide effective remedy to him because his human rights and fundamental freedoms have been violated; namely the right to freedom of expression and the right to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Furthermore, we call on you to abolish Article 318 of the Turkish Penal Code because it violates the right to freedom of expression, guaranteed also by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Turkey is a state party.

Yours sincerely,

Friedhelm Schneider

President of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

PS: As our NGO enjoys participatory status with the Council of Europe (CoE) we inform the Office of the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights about the recent violation of CoE human rights standards being the reason of this letter.

EBCO was founded in Brussels in 1979 as an umbrella structure for national associations of conscientious objectors in the European countries to promote the right to conscientious objection to preparations for, and participation in, war and any other type of military activity as a fundamental human right. It enjoys participatory status with the Council of Europe since 1998 and is a member of its Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations since 2005. It provides expertise and legal opinions on behalf of the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe. It is involved in drawing up the annual report of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Parliament on the application by the Member States of its resolutions on conscientious objection and civilian service, as determined in the "Bandrés Molet & Bindi Resolution" of 1994. It is a full member of the European Youth Forum since 1995.