



P R E S S R E L E A S E

Sudden death at age 63 of noted European pacifist leader and conscientious objector, Gerd Greune

Brussels, 1 September 2012



EBCO mourns the sudden death of Gerd Greune, co-founder of EBCO, and a prominent figure in the fields of pacifism, conscientious objection to military service, and human rights. A commemoration ceremony, organised by the family, will be held on Saturday 8 September 2012 in Brussels.

Gerd Greune (15 March 1949 - 24 August 2012) has always been a key person in EBCO: one of its founders and one of its pillars during all these years (President, Vice-President, Secretary General). The right to conscientious objection was actually Gerd Greune's first political issue, developing into a general involvement in the German and international Peace movement and campaigning against the stationing of nuclear weapons in Europe and nuclear arms in general. His interests also included anti-militarisation, conflict resolution, freedom of media, and human rights in general.

In 1979 Gerd Greune co-founded EBCO 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. He was also a former Executive Board Member and Secretary General (1979-1981) of the International Peace Bureau (IPB), and a board member and co-chairman of the German Peace Society - United War Resisters (the largest German peace organization) during the 1970s and 1980s. He became one of the speakers of the Coordination Committee of the German Peace Movement opposing new NATO missiles and played a significant role in the European networks against nuclear arms in the early 1980s (e.g. END). He always promoted an active East-West dialogue looking for common disarmament goals and possibilities for joint actions which finally led to the Olof Palme Peace March in 1987. From 1986 to 1997 he worked as a political advisor to the Executive Board of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany. He then founded the Institute for International Assistance and Solidarity (IFIAS) in Brussels (1997). From 1986 until his death he was its President and Secretary General. He ran projects in several countries, including Western Balkans (1997-1999), Bulgaria (2005-2007), Syria (2005-2007), Palestine (2006-2008), and Belarus (2011). Finally, from 2008 until his death he was the Development Director of the Arab Media Internet Network.

"EBCO is still in a state of shock following Gerd's sudden death. It's a huge loss for us and a huge loss for the conscientious objection and peace movements. Gerd Greune was an inspiring conscientious objector, a dedicated pacifist and a passionate human rights activist. EBCO will gratefully bear in remembrance his convincing commitment for international peace and understanding. We commemorate him as a person of integrity, as a networker and unifying figure for peace who motivated pacifists of different traditions and contexts to cooperate for the realisation of the human right of conscientious objection to military service. We will continue to work for the ideas and the causes to which he has been committed all his life.", Friedhelm Schneider, EBCO's President, said today.



Left photo: Gerd Greune in Nicosia on 29/09/2011 for the trial of Turkish-Cypriot conscientious objector Murat Kanatli.
Right photo: Gerd Greune in Berlin on 14/05/2011 for the end of conscription in Germany.

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.

Interview of Gerd Greune for the documentary "Freedom of Conscience" (by Andreas Melas) in May 2008:

"Conscientious objectors are people who are trying to implement another vision of their own life. They don't want to be part of a machinery which has been proved to be ineffective and even dangerous and even a sin for many people. So that is why we introduced into the international law this clause of conscientious protection. That means you have a conscience, you should have it, you should be allowed to follow your own conscience, and not only the state, or an ideology, or whatever. This is also a new phase of history. I hope you keep it, because this is always a question of strength; that you are doing that, that you should not give up!"



"Authoritarian societies, nationalistic societies, authoritarian regimes are trying with the army to escape from the discussion by oppression, by closing your mouth. But they get more and more in trouble because today it is impossible to behave in this way; which was maybe possible in the 19th century. Today we have fortunately the media and people who are able to technically open up a public debate; and this is indispensable and very good. And I hope more and more also this goes to other countries where this question is still not settled."

Photo: Gerd Greune at the Monument of the Unknown Deserter in Potsdam, Germany, 15/05/2011



Other gravestones are missing.

This particular one is missing:
Here lived a man who refused to shoot
at his fellow human beings.
Honour his memory.

FOR THE UNKNOWN DESERTER

Kurt Tucholsky "Die Tafeln" (1925)
Designed and produced by Mehmet Aksoy

15th May 2011

INTERNATIONAL CONSCIENTIOUS
OBJECTORS DAY

We celebrate the end
of compulsory military service
in Germany.

European Bureau for
Conscientious Objection

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