



European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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

2021 Shministiyot Letter: EBCO signs the International Solidarity Declaration in support of the Israeli conscientious objectors

Brussels, 15 January 2021

On 5 January 2021 sixty Israeli teenagers published an open letter addressed to top Israeli officials, in which they declared their refusal to serve in the army in protest of its policies of occupation and apartheid. The so-called "[2021 Shministim Letter](#)" decries Israel's military control of Palestinians in the occupied territories, referring to the regime in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem as an "apartheid" system entailing "two different systems of law; one for Palestinians and another for Jews."

"It is our duty to oppose this destructive reality by uniting our struggles and refusing to serve these violent systems—chief among them the military," reads the letter, which was addressed to Defense Minister Benny Gantz, Education Minister Yoav Galant, and IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi.

"This is a great hopeful start of 2021" EBCO's President Alexia Tsouni stated today. "EBCO welcomes this inspiring initiative of these courageous Israeli teenagers and signs today the [International Solidarity Declaration](#): EBCO stands together with the Shministiyot (Israeli high schoolers) who are refusing to serve in the Israeli military. As people of conscience around the world, we share their commitment to solidarity, deep care for all people, and recognition that systems of oppression were created by people and can be dismantled by people. In refusing to take part in the Israeli government's occupation and by rejecting militarism and settler colonialism, the Shministiyot are demonstrating solidarity with the Palestinian people who live under occupation, as well as with Palestinian refugees and their descendants in the exile. It's our responsibility as a global community to support those who see injustice in their own societies and choose solidarity instead."

The sixty Israeli teenagers are calling for high school seniors (shministiyot) their age to ask themselves: "What and who are we serving when we enlist in the military? Why do we enlist? What reality do we create by serving in the military of the occupation? We want peace, and real peace requires justice. Justice requires acknowledgment of the historical and present injustices, and of the continuing Nakba. Justice requires reform in the form of the end of the occupation, the end of the siege on Gaza, and recognition of the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Justice demands solidarity, joint struggle, and refusal."

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.

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Photo: Conscientious objectors Shahar Peretz (left) and Daniel Peldi at an anti-annexation protest in the city of Rosh Ha'ayin June 2020. (Oren Ziv)

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