



**European
Bureau for
Conscientious
Objection**



ASEISTAKIELTÄYTYJÄLIITTO

J O I N T P R E S S R E L E A S E

EBCO in Finland: General Assembly, Press Conference and Action in support of the conscientious objectors and deserters from Russia's war of aggression

Brussels, 9 September 2022

The **European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO)** visited Helsinki and co-organised a number of events with its member organisation in Finland, the **Union of Conscientious Objectors (Aseistakieltäytyjäliitto - AKL)**, from 2nd to 6th September 2022.

On Monday September 5th a **press conference** was held in Helsinki Central Library Oodi, where EBCO and AKL gave the floor to **conscientious objectors from the war of aggression launched by Russia against Ukraine**, and called on **European governments to provide human rights protection and asylum** to all of them. You can watch the **video recording** here: <https://youtu.be/j4rc3qJfXGE>



Alexander Belik, exiled activist and lawyer from the **Russian Movement of Conscientious Objectors (MCO)**, was present in the event and explained the situation of conscientious objectors, deserters, war resisters and civil society in Russia, as well as the Russian opposition abroad.

Dr Yuri Sheliashenko, Executive Secretary of the **Ukrainian Pacifist Movement (UPM)**, spoke online from Kiev and explained the impact of the travel ban for all men, and the suspension of the human right to conscientious objection due to lack of provisions for alternative non-military service during military mobilisation.

Alexia Tsouni, President of **EBCO**, presented the [joint IFOR-WRI-EBCO-Connection e.V. appeal](#), which addresses to **the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)** calling on European governments to provide human rights protection to Russian conscientious objectors and deserters who refuse to fight in Russia's war of aggression, not forgetting Belarusian and Ukrainian conscientious objectors. The appeal is already supported by around 60 other peace, human rights and refugee organisations from all over Europe. The peace organisations reminded that **European Council President Charles Michel** has also [urged](#) EU countries to find ways to offer **asylum to Russian deserters who refuse to go to war**.

Derek Brett, on behalf of **EBCO**, presented the latest [EBCO Annual Report on conscientious objection to military service in Europe 2021](#) and referred to the relevant European and international standards.

The press conference was moderated by **Esa Noresvuo**, **EBCO** Secretary and delegate of **AKL**. A **fruitful discussion** followed the presentations, also with the active participation of **Mr. Kimmo Kiljunen**, **Member of the Finnish Parliament and PACE Representative**.

On Tuesday September 6th a **joint EBCO - AKL meeting** was held at the **Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment**. **Alexia Tsouni**, **Esa Noresvuo** and **Noora Pätsi** met with **Piritta Jokelainen**, Special Adviser of the Minister of Employment **Tuula Haatainen**, and discussed on the [MEMO on EBCO concerns and recommendations for the full implementation of the human right to conscientious objection to military service in Finland](#).



EBCO highlighted its recommendations to the government of Finland as follows:

- 1) **Reduce the length of the alternative non-military service** and ensure that alternative to military service is not punitive or discriminatory in its duration and nature and that it is accessible also to those who serve in the military.
- 2) **Guarantee equal access to information regarding the non-military service** for conscripts and ensure the same possibility also during the military service.
- 3) **Release all conscientious objectors** in prisons or in monitoring sentences and **abolish punishments** for conscientious objectors to military and alternative service.
- 4) **Maintain under civilian control** all committees and groups that are in charge of developing or maintaining non-military alternatives to military service and ensure their independence from the military authority.

- 5) **Avoid exposing minors to military initiatives** and in particular to the possibility of using weapons, even if replica or demo weapons.
- 6) **Ensure international protection to conscientious objectors** fleeing their countries where their rights are violated, including all those seeking to avoid involvement on either side in the current conflict in Ukraine. EBCO reminds that tourist visas are one potential route for those seeking to avoid military service to flee Russia.

On Saturday September 3rd the **EBCO General Assembly** took place in the **Peace Station and online** (hybrid meeting), kindly hosted by **AKL**. The next EBCO General Assembly will take place in Athens, Greece on Saturday April 22nd 2023.



On Friday September 2nd, EBCO met with **Finnish conscientious objectors to military service and peace activists** in the **Peace Station**, and expressed its **full support and solidarity** with total objector **Miro Partanen**, who is currently under **house arrest**.



On Sunday September 4th **EBCO** and **AKL** organised an **action at the European Union office in Helsinki** to promote the [joint IFOR-WRI-EBCO-Connection e.V. appeal](#) calling on the European governments to grant **protection and asylum to Russian and Belarusian as well as Ukrainian conscientious objectors and deserters.**



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