



**European
Bureau for
Conscientious
Objection**



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

Russia: Release all those who object to engage in the war and are illegally detained in the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine

Brussels, 28 March 2023

The [European Bureau for Conscientious Objection](#) (EBCO), [Connection e.V.](#) (Germany), the [International Fellowship of Reconciliation](#) (IFOR), and [War Resisters' International](#) (WRI) **strongly denounce the reported detention by the Russian authorities of large numbers of soldiers and mobilised civilians in a number of centres in Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine, because they refuse to participate in the war.** Russian authorities are reportedly using threats, psychological abuse and torture to force those detained to return to the front.

According to [VESNA](#) (Движение Весна), **“journalists have been able to confirm the existence of 13 such prisons, in which, according to relatives, more than 600 people are being held:** 1. Zaytseva, Luhansk province; 2. Zavitne Bazhanya, Donetsk province; 3. Dokuchayevsk, Donetsk province; 4. Perevalsk, Luhansk province; 5. Rubezhnoy, Luhansk province; 6. Kremennaya, Luhansk province; 7. Staromlynovk, Donetsk province; 8. Starobelsk, Luhansk province; 9. Golubovka, Luhansk province; 10. Bryank, Luhansk province; 11. Novtroitsk, Donetsk province; 12. Makarovo, Luhansk province; 13. Amvrosivsk, Donetsk province.”

Detentions in these prisons are unlawful, not being based on any court decision. In that they are based on refusal on grounds of conscience to participate in the "special military operation" **they are also arbitrary**, as resulting from attempts to exercise the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion guaranteed in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (as well as Articles 28 and 59 of the Russian Constitution) and thus constitute a violation also of Article 9 of that Covenant.

In addition, according to VESNA, **“mobilised civilians are kept in appalling conditions:** they are threatened with torture and execution, they are deprived of the medical help and food. In this way Russian authorities are trying to force them to return to the front, although they have not received proper training nor basic supplies.”

Major western mediaⁱ and independent Russian mediaⁱⁱ have been reporting for months the detention of Russian soldiers who refuse to continue to participate in the “special military operation” in Ukraine.

The four organisations support the petition “[Russia, stop illegal detention! Release conscientious objectors jailed in Ukraine](#)”, which demands from the Russian authorities, including the head of the investigative committee, Alexander Bastrykin, and the Supreme Commander of the Russian Army, Vladimir Putin to:

- Check all reports of cases of internal captivity and identify those responsible for the illegal detention of Russian military personnel;
- Establish personal data, location of detained military personnel and their state of health;
- Take urgent measures to release and protect the life and health of detained military personnel;
- Take measures to implement the constitutional right of detained military personnel to replace military service with alternative civilian service;
- Take measures to prevent organizing such illegal prisons in the future.

The organisations note that soldiers who cite reasons of conscience among the reasons for refusing to continue to fight should be considered conscientious objectors according to international law.

Those who specifically oppose the Ukraine war count as conscientious objectors, whether or not self-defined.

“The imprisonment of conscientious objectors is a **blatant violation of their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion**, guaranteed under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, **which is non-derogable in time of public emergency**, according to Article 4.2 of ICCPR. **All these conscientious objectors are prisoners of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally**”, Alexia Tsouni, EBCO, stated today.

“We remind the Russian government that they should **safeguard the right to conscientious objection to military service, including in wartime**, fully complying with the European and international standards”, Rudi Friedrich, Connection e.V., added.

“We also remind the Russian authorities that under the international standards **the right of conscientious objection to military service applies no less to professional members of the armed forces than to conscripts**, as it has been explicitly recognized, *inter alia*, by the OHCHR,ⁱⁱⁱ the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE),^{iv} the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe,^v and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), of the OSCE.^{vi}”, Zaira Zafarana, IFOR, underlined.

“The right to object also applies to **selective objectors** who believe that the use of force is justified in some circumstances but not in others.”^{vii}, Semih Sapmaz, WRI, stated.

The four organisations note that **Alan Mitchell, President of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT)** has stated that *“the Russian authorities must take effective steps to prevent torture and other forms of ill-treatment of persons deprived of their liberty in law enforcement establishments, prisons, military detention facilities, psychiatric hospitals, social care institutions and other places of deprivation of liberty, whether within the territory of the Russian Federation or in areas within the territory of Ukraine of which the Russian Federation exercises effective control.”*^{viii}

The organisations denounce all the cases of forced and even violent recruitment to the armies of both sides, as well as all the cases of persecution of conscientious objectors, deserters and non-violent anti-war protestors.

Sign the VESNA petition here: <https://www.change.org/p/russia-stop-illegal-detention-release-conscientious-objectors-jailed-in-ukraine>

Support the #ObjectWarCampaign: [Russia, Belarus, Ukraine: Protection and asylum for deserters and conscientious objectors to military service](#)



**#OBJECT WAR
CAMPAIGN**

Solidarity with conscientious objectors and deserters from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine **Sign now!**

**#ОткажиВойне
#ВідмовВійні**

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- ⁱ <https://www.newsweek.com/multiple-russian-soldiers-detained-refusing-fight-putins-war-1722915>
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- ⁱⁱ <https://theins.ru/news/253550>
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- ⁱⁱⁱ OHCHR, Approaches and challenges with regard to application procedures for obtaining the status of conscientious objector to military service in accordance with human rights standards, (A/HRC/41/23), 24 May 2019, para. 60(c). Available at: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/23>
- ^{iv} Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Recommendation 1518 (2001), para. 5.2. Available at: https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=16909&lang=en#_blank
- ^v Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Recommendation CM/Rec (2010) 4 "Human Rights of members of the armed forces", paras. 42 - 46. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/506979172.html>
- ^{vi} OSCE, ODIHR, *Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel*, 2008, Chapter 10 Conscientious Objection to Military Conscription and Service, 4. Best Practices and Recommendations, p. 85 [second point]. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/31393?download=true>
- ^{vii} OHCHR, Approaches and challenges with regard to application procedures for obtaining the status of conscientious objector to military service in accordance with human rights standards, (A/HRC/41/23), 24 May 2019, para. 60(d). Available at: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/23>
- ^{viii} Council of Europe, Statement from Alan Mitchell, President of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), 31/03/2022. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/-/-1>

The [European Bureau for Conscientious Objection \(EBCO\)](#) 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. EBCO enjoys participatory status with the Council of Europe since 1998 and is a member of its Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations since 2005. EBCO is entitled to lodge collective complaints concerning the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe since 2021. EBCO provides expertise and legal opinions on behalf of the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe. EBCO 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. EBCO is a full member of the European Youth Forum since 1995.

[War Resisters' International \(WRI\)](#) was founded in London in 1921 as a global network of grassroots organisations, groups and individuals working together for a world without war. WRI remains committed to its founding declaration that 'War is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined not to support any kind of war, and to strive for the removal of all causes of war'. Today WRI is a global pacifist and antimilitarist network with over 90 affiliated groups in 40 countries. WRI facilitates mutual support, by linking people together through publications, events and actions, initiating nonviolent campaigns that actively involve local groups and individuals, supporting those who oppose war and who challenge its causes, and promoting and educating people about pacifism and nonviolence. WRI runs three programmes of work that are important to the network: The Right to Refuse to Kill Programme, the Nonviolence Programme, and Countering the Militarisation of Youth.

The [International Fellowship of Reconciliation \(IFOR\)](#) was founded in 1914 in response to the horrors of war in Europe, and has taken a consistent stance against war and its preparation throughout its history. Today IFOR has branches, groups, and affiliates in over 40 countries on all continents, while the International Secretariat is located in the Netherlands. IFOR's membership includes adherents of all the major spiritual traditions as well as those who have other spiritual sources for their commitment to nonviolence. IFOR has observer and consultative status to the United Nations ECOSOC and UNESCO organisations. IFOR maintains permanent representatives in Geneva, New York and Vienna and at the UNESCO in Paris who regularly participate in conferences and meetings of UN bodies, providing testimony and expertise from different regional perspectives, promoting non-violent alternatives in the fields of human rights, development, and disarmament.

[Connection e.V.](#) was founded in 1993 as an association advocating a comprehensive right to conscientious objection at an international level. The organisation is based in Offenbach, Germany, and collaborates with groups opposing war, conscription and the military in Europe and beyond, extending to Turkey, Israel, the U.S., Latin America and Africa. Connection e.V. demands that conscientious objectors from war regions should get asylum, and offers counseling and information to refugees and support for their self-organisation.
