



# European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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## OPEN LETTER – URGENT

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**Subject: Support of conscientious objector Mitja Jakonen**

Brussels, 1 August 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

On behalf of the [European Bureau for Conscientious Objection \(EBCO\)](http://www.ebco-beoc.org), I am writing to you to express our support for conscientious objector Mitja Jakonen, who is a very active member of our member organisation in Finland, the Union of Conscientious Objectors ([Aseistakieltäytyjäliitto - AKL](http://aseistakieltäytyjäliitto.fi)).

We are gravely concerned about the possibility of Mitja Jakonen being punished for his conscientious objection to military service - even with house arrest!

We would like to remind you that the right to conscientious objection to military service is inherent in the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which is guaranteed, amongst others, under Article 9 of the European Convention, and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which is non-derogable even in a time of public emergency, as stated in Article 4(2) of ICCPR.

We would like to remind you that the UN Human Rights Committee examined Finland's seventh periodic report on the ICCPR on its 131<sup>st</sup> session which was held in March 2021, and issued a series of concluding observations relating to conscientious objection to military service, including that the Committee "notes with concern that the regular duration of alternative non-military service amounts to the longest period of military service and that, while such alternative service is under the direction of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, military personnel still take part in relevant working groups and committees determining the nature and duration of alternative service. It is also concerned about the insufficient dissemination of information about the right to conscientious objection and alternatives to military service (art. 18)" and "The State party should:

*(a) ensure that alternatives to military service are not punitive or discriminatory in terms of their nature or duration and remain of a civilian nature, outside military command; (b) halt all prosecutions of individuals who refuse to perform military service on grounds of conscience and release those who are currently serving related prison sentences; and (c) intensify its efforts to raise awareness among the public about the right to conscientious objection and the availability of alternatives to military service".* The Committee's criticism towards the situation of conscientious objectors has further increased compared to previous conclusions issued in 2013.

On 9 April 2021 EBCO published a [press release](#) urging Finland to urgently comply with the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee, to stop prosecuting and imprisoning conscientious objectors, and amend the civilian service which is still extremely punitive and discriminatory.

On 6 September 2022, in the framework of [EBCO General Assembly and parallel actions in Finland](#), EBCO and AKL met with Piritta Jokelainen, Special Adviser of the Minister of Employment Tuula Haatainen, at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Helsinki, and submitted a detailed [MEMO on EBCO concerns and recommendations for the full implementation of the human right to conscientious objection to military service in Finland](#).

Today, once again, EBCO repeats 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.

Please also check the section about Finland in [EBCO's Annual Report "Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2022/23"](#).

We thank you for your kind attention and we are looking forward to your prompt response.

Yours sincerely,



Alexia Tsouni  
EBCO President



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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.

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