
JOINT PRESS RELEASE

YURI SHELIAZHENKO*, CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR TO MILITARY SERVICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER, UNDER IMMEDIATE THREAT

January 23rd, 2026

The undersigned organizations express serious concern regarding the continued persecution of Ukrainian human rights defender **Yurii Sheliazhenko**, a conscientious objector to military service. **He is currently under an alarming threat of being arrested and forcibly conscripted under Ukraine's system of universal military registration**, which is enforced through coercive measures including arbitrary detentions and forced transfers to conscription offices. Such practices effectively compel conscientious objectors to act against their beliefs and directly violate Article 18(2) of the ICCPR, which prohibits coercion impairing freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

In answer to his appeals against the summon recently received at Christmas time, **Yurii Sheliazhenko** was sent a communication from a number of authorities,¹ **all stating in writing that there is not recognition of conscientious objection to military service in Ukraine in times of war**. The Secretariat of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets replied to a related complaint, "mobilization by the State of Ukraine is the only necessary and urgent measure to prevent aggression by another state, during which the possibility of alternative service is excluded (since mobilization itself is aimed not simply at performing military service, but at protecting the Motherland from military invasion by another state). At the same time, the current legislation provides for the liability of persons guilty of violating the legislation on military duty and military service."

This violates international standards and constitute a grievous violation of the right of those who refuse to serve in the military on ground of conscience. Indeed, good practices of provisions related to alternative service during armed conflicts can be traced in the history of other countries.²

Conscientious objection to military service is a human right inherent in article 18 of the ICCPR on freedom of thought, conscience and religion³ and art. 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

According to international human rights law and standards the right to conscientious objection applies both in wartime and in peacetime, as acknowledged by the Human Rights Committee.⁴ Article 4, paragraph 2, of the ICCPR does not permit any derogation from the obligations of a State Party concerning Article 18 on freedom of thought, conscience and religion even in time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation.⁵

According to reports of the United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights and Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner, several conscientious objectors in Ukraine have been already tortured and imprisoned.⁶

¹ Authorities including Mr. Stanislav Kulish -the Director of the Department for Monitoring the Observance of Rights in the Defence Sector and the Rights of Veterans and Military Personnel, Prisoners of War and Their Family Members in the Secretariat of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine-, Colonel Serhii Kalugin -Commander of the Pechersk District Territorial Conscription Centre in Kyiv City- and Mr. Taras Kovalchuk -Deputy Head of Third Investigative Division of the Territorial Directorate of the State Bureau of Investigations Situated in Kyiv City.

² "Conscientious objection in time of war and other national emergencies", EBCO 2024 annual report, pages 199-204. https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2025-06-05-EBCO_Annual_Report_2024.pdf

³ UN Human Rights Committee, Communication No. 1642-1741/2007, Jeong et al. v. Republic of Korea (CCPR/C/101/D/1642-1741/2007), 27 April 2011, para. 7.3. <https://juris.ohchr.org/casedetails/1637/en-US>

⁴ E.g. CCPR/CO/82/FIN, 2 December 2004, para. 14. <http://undocs.org/CCPR/CO/82/FIN>

⁵ See also: Amy Maguire, "Why banning men from leaving Ukraine violates their human rights", *The Conversation*, 8 March 2022.

<https://theconversation.com/why-banning-men-from-leaving-ukraine-violates-their-human-rights-178411>

And "Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, Public sector guidance sheet".

<https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/human-rights-and-anti-discrimination/human-rights-scrutiny/public-sector-guidance-sheets/right-freedom-thought-conscience-and-religion-or-belief#can-the-right-to-freedom-of-thought-conscience-and-religion-or-belief-be-limited>

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/41st-periodic-report-human-rights-situation-ukraine-1-december-2024-31> (paras. 85, 86)

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/41st-periodic-report-human-rights-situation-ukraine-1-september-30> (paras. 90, 91)

<https://rm.coe.int/memorandum-on-human-rights-elements-for-peace-in-ukraine-by-michael-o-1680b678ec> (paras. 49, 50)

Violating the right to conscientious objection to military service can also undermine democratic principles that ensure survival of an inclusive society, rather than oppressing a portion of citizens who seek and support, for example, alternatives to warfare in order to establish peace and ensure the well-being of their community.

➤ **We urge the Ukrainian authority to withdraw from persecuting conscientious objectors in the country and in particular Mr. Sheliazhenko** who has been a publicly declared conscientious objector since 1998 and we urge the Government to stop criminalizing those exercising the human right to conscientious objection to military.

➤ **We urge the Ukrainian authority to withdraw accusation of alleged “justification of Russian aggression” against Mr. Sheliazhenko⁷ because of his pacifist expressions, in which he called for nonviolent resistance to Russian aggression and condemned it along with all other wars; and to ensure his freedom of expression and rights are protected under Ukrainian laws, in line with international standards.**

The case of Mr. Sheliazhenko has been previously included in a **Communication by the Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief**.⁸ The case of Mr. Sheliazhenko, the communication of the Special Rapporteurs and the response of the Ukrainian authorities were highlighted also by the **OHCHR**, in its report concerning Conscientious objection to military service, and particularly in the chapter titled **“Refrain from unduly restricting the human rights of those representing or advocating for the rights of conscientious objectors”**.⁹ His case has been highlighted also in Amnesty International’s Annual Report 2023/2024.¹⁰

➤ **We call on the international community to exercise all proper actions to ensure that human rights defenders and peace activists are not criminalized for their actions for peace and nonviolence; moreover, that the right to conscientious objection is fully implemented in line with international standards and that conscientious objectors are provided with the necessary protection against persecution in their country of origin, also with asylum.**

* Mr. Sheliazhenko is an academic, the executive secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement (member organization of the War resisters International funded in 1921) and a member of the board of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection¹¹ and of World Beyond War.

Signing organizations (in alphabetical order)

Agir pour la Paix – Belgium

Aktive Arbeitslose Österreich – Austria

Anglican Pacifist Fellowship

Another Development Foundation

Artist for Peace - Sweden

Aseistakieltäytyjälitto (AKL) – Finland

Association of Conscientious Objectors – Greece

⁷ Mr. Sheliazhenko is charged under Article 436-2 (2) of Criminal Code of Ukraine, that provides for punishments up to 5 years in prison and confiscation of property, for sending to President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy a pacifist statement "Peace Agenda for Ukraine and the World" (<https://www.civilni.media/235/>). The statement contains, along with support for UN GA condemnation of Russian aggression, calls to all parties of the armed conflict to respect rights of conscientious objectors, allow them to resist war non-violently, and not demonize the enemy to a degree excluding any negotiations, that in view of prosecution allegedly "justify Russian aggression". Yuri's house was searched, his smartphone and computer seized in 2023, he was under house arrest till February 2024, with a trial -postponed numerous times- continuing till today.

⁸ AL UKR 1/2023, 8 November 2023, p. 5-6. <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=28562>

⁹ A/HRC/56/30, 23 April 2024, para. 45. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/30>

¹⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/> p. 385.

¹¹ <https://ebco-beoc.org/ebcoboard>

Associazione Nazionale Giuristi Democratici – Italy

Board of Green Alternative e.V.

BOCS Civilization Planning Foundation – Hungary

Bottna för Fred (Bottna for Peace) – Sweden

Bund für Soziale Verteidigung (Federation for Social Defence)

Bundesvereinigung Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz e.V. – Germany

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament – UK

Center for Global Nonkilling

Center for Nonviolent Action, Lausanne – Switzerland

Center on Conscience & War – USA

Centre d'Estudis per la pau JM Delàs – Spain

Church and Peace e.V. (European Ecumenical Peace Network)

Community of Christ British Isles Mission Centre

Connection e.V.

Conscientious Objection Initiative – Cyprus

Conscientious Objection Watch – Turkiye

Coordinamento Fiorentino contro il Riarmo – Italy

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

De Nieuwe Vredesbeweging – The Netherlands

Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft - Vereinigte KriegsdienstgegnerInnen Frankfurt – Germany

DFG-VK – Germany

Dhesarme – Brazilian Action for Humanitarian Disarmament

DiEM25

EAK – Germany

European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO)

Falu United Nations Association – Sweden

FemArtAct social cooperative – Greece

Folk mot DCA – Sweden

Forum Friedensethik in the Protestant Church of Baden – Germany

Forum Nord-Sud – Belgium

Friedensinitiative Hersfeld-Rotenburg

Friedenszentrum Braunschweig e.V.

Gewaltfrei Grün e.V. (non-violent green association)

Global Veterans Peace Network

Grüne Alternative e.V.

Halte aux guerres, halte à la guerre sociale – Belgium

Independent and Peaceful Australia network

Institute of Peace and Law – Ukraine

International Peace Bureau

Internationale der Kriegsdienstgegner*innen (IDK)

Internationaler Versöhnungsbund - österreichischer Zweig (Austrian branch of IFOR)

Internationaler Versöhnungsbund e.V. (German branch of IFOR)

Iona Community

ISP VIENNA – AbFaNG – Austria

Kerk en Vrede – The Netherlands

La Acción Colectiva de Objetores y Objetoras de Conciencia (ACOOC) – Colombia

Lay Down Your Arms – Norway & Sweden

Le Cercle de libre Pensée - Kring voor het Vrije Denken (CLP-KVD)

Lex Innocentium 21st Century – Ireland

Meeting of Friends of Ukraine – Ukraine

MERA25 - Italy

Mesarvot - Israel

MIR France (French branch of IFOR)

Montreal for a World Beyond War

Movimento Internazionale della Riconciliazione - MIR Italy (Italian branch of IFOR)

Movimento Nonviolento – Italy

Netzwerk Friedenssteuer e.V. – Germany

No to war - no to NATO

Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme – Cameroon

Observatorio de Militarismo – Colombia

Our House – Belarus & Lithuania

Pax Christi England & Wales

Pax Christi Flanders

Pax Christi Germany

Pax Christi Rhein-Main

Peace and Social Concerns committee of Ottawa Quakers

Post-Soviet Left

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship – USA

Public Council of the South Coast of the Gulf of Finland

Quaker Council for European Affairs

Quäker-Hilfe e.V. – Germany

Quakers in Flanders

Re-Imagining New Communities

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) – The Netherlands

School of the Americas Watch (SOAW) – Chile

SERAPAZ – México

Stop fuelling war, cessez d'alimenter la guerre

Stop the War Coalition

Stop the War Coalition Philippines

Stop Wapenhandel – The Netherlands

Stoparmy Movement – Russia

Sustainable Peace and Development Organization (SPADO)

Svenska fredskommitten Göteborg – Sweden

Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society – Sweden

Swedish Peace Committee – Sweden

The Association of Conscientious Objectors – Greece

The Center on Conscience & War – USA

The Fellowship of Reconciliation England and Scotland

The Peace Committee of The Swedish Society of Friends – Sweden

The Peace Institute, Ljubljana – Slovenia

The Peace Movement of Orust – Sweden

transform! Italia

Transnational Institute

Ukrainian Pacifist Movement – Ukraine

Vrede vzw (Belgian Peace organisation) – Belgium

Vredesactie – Belgium

Vredesbeweging Pais (Dutch section of War Resisters International)

War Resisters' International

WILPF-Bergen

Women Against Nuclear Power – Finland

Women for Peace – Finland

World Beyond War

World Without War