

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

Ukraine: Stop the criminalization of peace and human rights speech and the prosecution of Yurii Sheliazhenko, Executive Secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement

7 June 2024

The undersigned organizations **express their deep disappointment and grave concerns about the continuing harassment of peace activists and conscientious objectors, including the obviously arbitrary prosecution of Yurii Sheliazhenko, Executive Secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement and EBCO Board member, whose trial is set on 11 June 2024 at 14:15 Kyiv time, in the Pecherskyi District Court of Kyiv City (case No 757/16536/24-k, judge Oleg Bilotserkivets) and could result in jail sentence up to five years.**

Yurii Sheliazhenko suffered a search of his apartment on 3rd August 2023 and has since been living under repeatedly extended house arrest while being investigated by the Ukrainian Security Service. The only allegation that have so far been made public against him is that a September 2022 statement ("Peace agenda for Ukraine and the World") which he had issued in the name of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement "justified Russian aggression", despite the fact that it explicitly condemned the invasion and all sorts of war. His computer and smartphone were seized, and, despite a Court ruling, have not been returned. The ulterior objective of this persecution of a pacifist appears to be disrupting his advocacy for the right to refuse to kill and his legal assistance to conscientious objectors. The Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, reacting to a letter of Security Service of Ukraine (the Security Service of Ukraine also published a press release calling Yurii "enemy's agitator"), has asked the Kyiv Region Administrative Court to prohibit and dissolve the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, member organization of both EBCO and WRI.

The undersigned organisations urge the European Union (EU) to ensure that recognition and the full implementation of the right to conscientious objection, as a vital safeguard of democratic values and principles in time of national emergency caused by Russian aggression, be considered a necessary condition of Ukraine's accession to the EU during forthcoming negotiations. The right to conscientious objection is recognised, amongst others, in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 10 - Freedom of thought, conscience and religion).

The undersigned organisations call on Ukraine to immediately drop all charges against Yurii Sheliazhenko and restore his seized personal items. We also call for the prompt reversion of the suspension of the human right to conscientious objection in the country, full freedom of expression for human rights defenders, and the end of persecution against conscientious objectors to military service: the release of prisoner of conscience Dmytro Zelinsky, the honourable discharge of Andrii Vyshnevetsky, and the acquittal of Vitaly Alekseenko and Mykhailo Yavorsky. We also call upon Ukraine to lift the prohibition on all men aged 18 to 60 from leaving the country and other conscription enforcement practices incompatible with Ukraine's human rights obligations, including arbitrary detentions of conscripts and the requirement of military registration as a prerequisite for the legality of any civil acts such as education, employment, marriage, social security, registration of the place of residence, etc. The organisations express grave concern regarding the new legislation imposing severe punishments on "draft evaders" without any exception for conscientious objectors, mobilization policies demanding universal military registration for all men aged 18-60 without exception for conscientious objectors, under threat of severe fines and forced transportation to military recruitment centres. We welcome efforts of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets who mentioned in his 2023 annual report the absence of procedures of application for alternative non-military service under martial law and called on the members of parliament to remedy. We regret that these efforts were not successful and the gap which violates the Constitution of Ukraine, ICCPR and ECHR given that currently in Ukraine there are still no procedures of application for a status of conscientious objector.

We urge Ukraine to respect the human right to freedom of expression and refrain from criminalizing speech, especially speech that advocates for peace, as in the case of Yuriy Sheliashenko who is standing for peace and human rights and calling for the end of the armed conflict and thus war atrocities.

At the same time the organisations call on Russia to immediately **and unconditionally release all those hundreds of soldiers and mobilised civilians who object to engage in the war and are illegally detained in a number of centres in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine.** Russian authorities are reportedly using threats, psychological abuse and torture to force those detained to return to the front.

The organisations call on both Russia and Ukraine to safeguard the right to conscientious objection to military service, including in wartime, fully complying with the European and international standards, amongst others the standards set by the European Court of Human Rights. **The right to conscientious objection** to military service is inherent in the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, guaranteed under 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.

The organisations strongly condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine and call on all soldiers not to participate in hostilities and on all recruits to refuse military service. **They 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. **They urge EU and all countries to work for peace, commit to diplomacy and negotiations, ensure human rights protection and grant asylum and visas to those who object the war.**

Signatory organizations:

- **European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO)**
- **International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR)**
- **War Resisters' International (WRI)**
- **Connection e.V.**
- **Ukrainian Pacifist Movement**
- **Movimento Internazionale della Riconciliazione (MIR Italy)**
- **Presenza - Italy**
- **International Centre of civil initiatives "Our House" - Belarus**
- **Giuristi democratici - Italy**
- **Internationaler Versöhnungsbund, österreichischer Zweig (FOR Austria)**
- **The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR England and Scotland)**
- **Centre for peace research and peace education, University of Klagenfurt - Austria**
- **Center on Conscience & War - USA**
- **Anglican Pacifist Fellowship - UK**
- **Pax Christi Italia**
- **Lebenshaus Schwäbische Alb - Community for Social Justice, Peace and Ecology e.V.**
- **BOCS Civilization Planning Foundation - Hungary**
- **Vrede vzw - Belgium**
- **Peace & Justice - Scotland**
- **Peace and Development Foundation-Africa (PDF-Africa) Uganda**
- **Un Ponte per - Italy**
- **Internationale der Kriegsdienstgegner*innen (IDK)**
- **Kerk en Vrede - The Netherlands**
- **Vredesactie - Belgium**
- **Stop Wapenhandel - The Netherlands**
- **Ev. Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kriegsdienstverweigerung und Frieden (EAK) - Germany**
- **Aktionsgemeinschaft Dienst für den Frieden (AGDF) - Germany**
- **International Peace Bureau (IPB)**
- **Conscientious Objection Watch - Turkey**
- **Peace Institute - Slovenia**
- **Mouvement International de la Réconciliation (MIR France)**
- **Pax Christi Germany**
- **IFOR - MIR - Switzerland**
- **Association of Conscientious Objectors - Greece**
- **Pax Christi Flanders**

CONTACTS

- Alexia Tsouni (English, Greek), European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO), ebco@ebco-beoc.org, www.ebco-beoc.org
- Semih Sapmaz (English, Turkish), War Resisters' International (WRI), semih@wri-irg.org, www.wri-irg.org
- Rudi Friedrich (Deutsch, English), Connection e.V., office@Connection-eV.org, www.Connection-eV.org
- Zaira Zafarana (Italian, English), Connection e.V., zaira.zafarana@Connection-eV.org, www.Connection-eV.org
- Christian Renoux (French, English), International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR), office@ifor.org, www.ifor.org
- Yuriy Sheliashenko (Ukrainian, English, Russian), Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, yuriy.sheliashenko@gmail.com, <http://pacifism.org.ua/>

MORE INFORMATION

EBCO's Annual Report "Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2023/24", covering the region of **Council of Europe** (CoE) as well as **Russia** (former CoE member state) and **Belarus** (candidate CoE member state): https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2024-05-15-EBCO_Annual_Report_2023-24.pdf

UN Human Rights Council Report "Situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol - Interim report of the Secretary-General" (A/HRC/56/69): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session56/list-reports>

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



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

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