

# JOINT PRESS RELEASE

July 29, 2024

## **Protection for Belarusian conscientious objectors like Vitali Dvarashyn and Mikita Sviryd who are under threat of deportation to Belarus**

Lithuania should protect Belarusian conscientious objectors and deserters, grant adequate legal protection and prevent their deportation!

*The undersigned organizations are genuinely concerned by the threat of the Lithuanian authorities to immediately deport the Belarusian conscientious objector Vitali Dvarashyn and deserter Mikita Sviryd to Belarus where they are at risk of persecution, imprisonment, and death penalty. We demand immediate action from the Lithuanian authorities to prevent the deportation of conscientious objectors back to Belarus and grant asylum in Lithuania where they have been seeking protection.*

**Belarusian conscientious objector [Vitali Dvarashyn](#)**<sup>1</sup>, as other Belarusian asylum seekers in Lithuania, has been declared “a threat to national security in Lithuania” in 2023 after seven years of residence permit in the country. He consequently suffered solitary confinement in a refugee camp and has been denied asylum on May 29, 2024 with the claim that he would not be in danger in Belarus. On June 13, 2024 he escaped his arrest and the risk of immediate deportation and went into hiding out of terror and fear.

**Belarusian deserter [Mikita Sviryd](#)**<sup>2</sup> has been denied asylum on November 20, 2023 and although he appealed, as Vitali did, he was not allowed to present in a hearing his case which is of serious concern because of the reintroduction of the death penalty in Belarus. He is thus desperately looking for ways to protect his life.

**We urge the Lithuanian Authorities to prevent the deportation of Vitali Davarshyn and Mikita Svyrid -and any other deserter, draft evader and refuser- to Belarus by all means and to provide adequate protection to them.**

**As reported by the UN Special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Ms. Anais Marin, at the last [UN Human Rights Council](#)**<sup>3</sup>, the situation of human rights in Belarus is very alarming and thus is not a safe country for conscientious objectors, deserters, and war resisters. **The UN Special rapporteur has also highlighted that “the Government [of Belarus] continues to actively support the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine”**<sup>4</sup>.

We are alarmed that such information is not taken in account by the Lithuanian authorities which uphold the conviction that it is safe for deserters and conscientious objectors to return to Belarus. “This is not true”, explains Olga Karatch from the International Centre for Civil Initiatives Our House (Nash Dom), “Vitali Dvarashyn and Mikita Sviryd face persecution and imprisonment if they are forcibly

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<sup>1</sup> <https://de.connection-ev.org/article-4206>

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-4203>

<sup>3</sup> <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F56%2F65&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&Lang>

<sup>4</sup> A/HRC/56/65, par 14.

<https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F56%2F65&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&Lang>

returned to Belarus. For deserters like Mikita, even the death penalty is legal. This has to be prevented by all means.”

Additionally, we are deeply concerned to read that the Lithuanian Migration Department does not consider relevant the reporting from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Belarus.<sup>5</sup>

The criminal liability for evading military conscription<sup>6</sup>, the continuous violations of the human right to conscientious objection to military service, and the reintroduction of the death penalty for deserters, are strong evidence that Belarus is not a safe country for conscientious objectors.

**The undersigned organizations, therefore, call on Lithuania to immediately prevent the deportation of Belarusian deserters and conscientious objectors and to provide adequate protection to them.**

**As highlighted in the UNHCR Guidelines on International protection, conscientious objectors to military service are eligible for refugee status if they are at risk of persecution in their own country<sup>7</sup> and this fully apply to Belarusian conscientious objectors.**

The right to conscientious objection to military service is a human right inherent to the human right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (also present in the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights, Article 10 – Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion). It is also worth reminding that in Belarus there is a high risk of recruitment and mobilization in support of the war of aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine which constitutes a violation of international law.

**The undersigned organizations urge Lithuania and the other members of the European Union to provide full protection to conscientious objectors and deserters who flee from Belarus where they are persecuted and their right to conscientious objection is not recognized, and call on the European institutions to ensure the full implementation of the right to conscientious objection to military service in all its member states.**

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**For additional details on the individual cases mentioned:**

Vitali Dvarashyn: <https://news.house/de/62206>

Mikita Sviryd: <https://news.house/62216>

**For more information and interviews please contact:**

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<sup>5</sup> Administrative Case No. eA-2053-789/2024 of 23 July 2024, the Lithuanian Migration Department. <https://news.house/62606>

<sup>6</sup> “Evasion from call-up to military service on the mobilization (Art. 434), evasion of regular call-up to active military service (Art. 435), failure of a reservist or person liable for military service to appear for military training or special classes (Art. 436), avoidance of military registration by a conscript or person liable for military duty (Art. 437).” European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, Annual report, p. 46-47. [https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2024-05-15-EBCO\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2023-24.pdf](https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2024-05-15-EBCO_Annual_Report_2023-24.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>UNHCR, Guidelines on International Protection No.10: Claims to refugee status related to military service within the context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/529efd2e9.pdf>

## Signatory organizations:

- **Connection e.V.**
- **Our House**
- **War Resisters' International (WRI)**
- **European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO)**
- **International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR)**
- **Presenza International**
- **International Peace Bureau (IPB)**
- **Peace Tax International (CPTI) – UK**
- **Internationale der Kriegsdienstgegner\*innen (IDK) – Germany**
- **Movimento Internazionale della Riconciliazione – Italy**
- **Center on Conscience & War – USA**
- **BOCS Civilization Planning Foundation – Hungary**
- **Vrede vzw – Belgium**
- **Centre pour l'Action Non-violente – Switzerland**
- **Begegnungszentrum für aktive Gewaltlosigkeit – Austria**
- **Kerk en Vrede – The Netherlands**
- **Sudanese Organization for Nonviolence and Development (SONAD) – Sudan**
- **Association of Greek Conscientious Objectors – Greece**
- **Arbeitsstelle Frieden und Umwelt der Evangelischen Kirche der Pfalz (Protestantische Landeskirche) – Germany**
- **Internationaler Versöhnungsbund, österreichischer Zweig – Austria**
- **Pax Christi Flanders – Belgium**
- **Aseistakieltäytyjäliitto - The Finnish Union of Conscientious Objectors (AKL) – Finland**
- **Giuristi Democratici – Italy**
- **Leuven Peace Movement – Belgium**
- **Belgian Coalition Stop depleted uranium weapons – Belgium**
- **Center for Global Nonkilling – Switzerland**
- **Un Ponte Per – Italy**
- **Conscientious Objection Watch – Turkey**
- **Vredesactie – Belgium**
- **Flüchtlingsrat Schleswig-Holstein e.V. – Germany**
- **Komitee für Grundrechte und Demokratie e.V. – Germany**
- **Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft - Vereinigte KriegsdienstgegnerInnen (DFG-VK) – Germany**
- **Stephan Brües, Ko-Vorsitzender Bund für Soziale Verteidigung (BSV) – Germany**
- **Forum gewerkschaftliche Linke Berlin – Germany**
- **Centro Studi Sereno Regis – Italy**
- **Pax Christi Italia – Italy**
- **Arbeitskreis Internationalismus der IG Metall Berlin – Germany**
- **Lebenshaus Schwäbische Alb - Gemeinschaft für soziale Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Ökologie e.V. – Germany**
- **ACAT – Germany**
- **Initiative Solidarität für Pazifist:innen aus Osteuropa – Germany**
- **ACAT – Switzerland**

- **Hessischer Flüchtlingsrat** – Germany
- **Internationaler Versöhnungsbund, deutscher Zweig** – Germany
- **Frauennetzwerk für Frieden** – Germany
- **Federal Association of Vietnamese Refugees in the Federal Republic of Germany** – Germany
- **Forum Friedensethik in der Evangelischen Landeskirche in Baden (FFE)** – Germany
- **Grazer Initiative für Frieden und Neutralität (GIFFUN)** – Austria
- **Pax Christi Rottenburg-Stuttgart** – Germany
- **Graswurzelrevolution** – Germany
- **Netzwerk Friedenskooperative** – Germany
- **International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)** – Germany
- **NaturFreunde Deutschlands** – Germany
- **SOS Balkanroute** – Austria
- **Vienna Voice** – Austria
- **LINKS-Wien** – Austria
- **Grüne Alternative e.V** – Germany
- **The Movement of Conscientious Objectors (MCO)** – Russia