



15th May International CO Day: Focus on Greece

An Interview with a Greek Conscientious Objector

Lazaros Petromelidis is a Greek CO who has been persecuted for his beliefs since 1992. He spoke with Kat Barton about his long struggle for recognition of his right to refuse.

KB :When did you first realise that your conscience would not allow you to participate in the military?

LP :In 1991, when I finished university and it was my time to go to the army - although I had heard about the first CO's in 1987/88 so it was not something new for me.

KB :Why are you a conscientious objector?

LP :I could never imagine myself in the army. I want to have the right to chose to serve in another way. No one questions why we must serve in the army, but why do we have an army of more than 100,000 people - it's too many - and why do we give so much money to the army?

KB :What did you do when you were first called up for service?

LP :I wrote a letter stating that I didn't want to go but was willing to do an alternative service instead.

KB :How were you treated by the military & the Greek authorities on declaring your CO status?

LP :The authorities answered my letter within 2 hours of receiving it! They said that there was no alternative service in Greece and so I

must go to the army. My letter was something strange for them. Although they knew about CO's because of others, they didn't want to accept it. They asked me why I didn't want to go. They told me that it wasn't something bad, that I was an educated young man and that I mustn't destroy my life!

KB :What support was available when you first declared your CO status?

LP :I had support from the Association of Greek CO's so I was able to discuss things with people who had the same problem as me.

KB :What do your friends and family think about you being a CO?

LP :My friends accepted it as my decision. My family was very afraid because it was something very new for them. They were afraid of conflict with the army. I don't want to discuss it with them because it is difficult for them. My father told me: "It's very serious - what you're doing - think about the military court."

KB :How have your beliefs and the Greek authorities' reaction to them affected you?

LP :Between 1992 and 1996 there wasn't a problem - nobody bothered me for these 4 years. But everyone knew that in 1997 the new law would be brought in and then the military would want to



Greek CO Lazaros Petromelidis in court

punish CO's.

In those days, many of us had to be arrested and imprisoned before we could claim CO status and the right to do civilian service. It was just revenge against us older objectors.

Personally, there was a difference between me and other objectors because I decided to live at a known address - my home - whereas the other COs left their homes to avoid being arrested.

KB :How many times have you been imprisoned, and why?

LP :Three times. The first time was in 1998 for draft evasion.

Photo: Association of Greek COs

Then, in 1999, I had CO status but was imprisoned for refusing to perform a civilian service of 30 months. If I had gone to the military I would have performed 4 months - I cannot compare 4 months to 30 months!

The third time I was imprisoned was in 2001. Here in Greece they call you up for military service every 3 months, so you are called up, refuse, are imprisoned and then called up again 3 months later. I can't be punished every 3 months because I don't want to go to the army!

Really I should be in prison right now - in December 2004 I was sentenced in my absence to 2 ½ years in prison - maybe the time will come when they decide to arrest me. I'm in their hands - I cannot do anything.

KB :How have attitudes to conscription & CO changed in Greece since you first declared your CO?

LP :In the late 80's and early 90's, the army was considered a normal thing for Greek boys - it was accepted. No body asked "why do I have to go?" I think now many boys don't want to go so they just don't do it or they go to a foreign country. But they don't say it publicly - they are afraid. It's easy to go to the public hospital and say you're crazy or melancholic and get a paper saying you're not fit to serve. It happens often in Greece - maybe 3-4000 people per year use this method. Since I first became a CO there have been changes. The main problem is the duration of the civilian service. Now, we have a new law so civilian service is 2 times military service minus one month.

continued on page 2

Editorial

This issue of the Broken Rifle focuses on conscientious objection in Greece and International CO Day. Since the 1980's International CO Day, celebrated on 15th May every year, has been an important day of action highlighting CO struggle. This year we are turning our attention to CO's in Greece and will be holding an International Nonviolence Training in Thessaloniki (see box below). Greece was the last EU country to recognise the right to conscientious objection when it finally did so in 1997. However, despite this recognition there are numerous problems with Greek CO law and practice which amount to discrimination against conscientious objectors. In this issue we will look at the history of CO in Greece (page 3), the reality of life for Greek CO's (see the interview opposite) as well as the social implications of conscription and CO (page 2). We have chosen Greece because of the especially difficult situation of Greek CO's but also in order to support the relatively new but flourishing CO and antimilitarism movement there. In addition, this year has seen increased international interest in Greece, for example in March the UN Human Rights Committee examined human rights abuses in the country. WRI was present on this occasion to address the Committee on Greek CO issues and the changes that need to be made if Greece is to comply with internationally recognised standards (see page 4 for a report on the visit).

WRI are committed to raising awareness of antimilitarist and CO issues. I hope you will enjoy this edition of the Broken Rifle and that you will continue to support the work of WRI by donating generously.

Kat Barton WRI Staff Member

The Broken Rifle

The Broken Rifle is the newsletter of War Resisters' International, and is published in English, Spanish, French and German. This is issue 66, May 2005. This issue of *The Broken Rifle* was produced by Kat Barton. Special thanks go to Yannis Christovergis and the Association of Greek Conscientious Objectors. If you want extra copies of this issue of *The Broken Rifle*, please contact the WRI office, or download it from our website.

War Resisters' International,
5 Caledonian Road,
London N1 9DX, Britain
tel +44-20-7278 4040
fax +44-20-7278 0444
info@wri-irg.org
http://wri-irg.org/pubs/br66-en.htm

15th May: International Conscientious Objectors Day

What? Since the 1980's, International CO Day has been celebrated as a day of nonviolent direct action in support of CO struggle. Each year, there is a focus on the struggle in a particular country which is accompanied by decentral activities all over the world. This year's activities will focus on Greece with a Training in Nonviolent Action and discussions on issues in Greece taking place between 9th and 14th May

When? Sunday 15th May (with training running up to it: 9th-14th)

Where? Thessaloniki, Greece

Why Greece? Although Greece passed a law on conscientious objection in 1997, this law does not meet international standards, and creates numerous problems for conscientious objectors which result in discrimination. The law on conscientious objection and the case of Georgios Monastiriotis, who refused to participate in Greek military support operations for the occupation of Iraq, have both lead to increased interest in conscientious objection and growth of the Greek CO movement. Combined with last month's review of Greece by the UN Human Rights Committee, this provides a good climate for increased international activities on conscientious objection in Greece.

Objectives Strengthening the Association of Greek COs through international support. Raising international awareness about the treatment of COs in Greece. Linking the issue of CO in Greece with nonviolent resistance and nonviolent direct action as a tool for social change movements. Exchange of experience in NV direct action among groups from Greece and abroad. Strengthening international networks of COs through joint training and action.

Training & Action: The international training in nonviolent action will bring together participants from Europe and Greece, who will use the training to share practical tools for nonviolent action. It will be accompanied by two afternoons of discussions around issues of nationalism, war, and the deconstruction of societies as a result which will build on the experience from the Balkans and the Middle East. It will also look at the role of militarism in Greek society, and at neo-colonialism and the role NATO is playing. The training will also prepare for a joint nonviolent action on 15 May. If you are interested in taking part in 15th May activities, please contact the WRI as soon as possible.

Continued from page 1:

I believe it's better to have that law, rather than no law. I think that year by year it will get better. Now we're not too many: no more than 100 ideological COs and about 1000 religious COs - mostly Jehovah's Witnesses - but they don't fight very publicly - they're not so active as we are. If there were more objectors, it would be better.

KB :In an ideal situation, what provisions would the Greek authorities make for CO's?

LP :We need to have the same duration for the alternative service as for the military service.

KB :What advise would you give to Greek men thinking about applying for CO status?

LP :Not to be afraid.

KB :Do you ever have doubts about continuing your struggle?

LP :No, no, no!

KB :What can you say about the Greek CO movement - as it stands, how it is developing and its future?

LP :We are not a movement but we have a voice.

The last 2 years we've had some increase in numbers because of the young people that come to us. We try to convince them that they don't need to be afraid and that we will support them if they decide to go public. This is very important work for us. Greek society doesn't discuss CO - we started the discussion at the end of the 80's and we will continue it.

We change things - but we are not many. There are some more objectors who don't want to work with the association - they declare their objection but work alone. We don't expect more than 2 or 3 cases per year - but it's better than 1 per year as we had before, so it's very good! We are few but we have done a lot compared to our power.

In 10 years - maybe earlier - Greece may have a professional army and then we will not need a CO movement like the one we have now. Instead, we may discuss about militarism in general, the objection of professional soldiers and the Greek Army in other countries. But, until the end of armies, we will continue.

Lazaros spoke to Kat Barton

The REAL Meaning of Conscription

Conscription in Greece has wide-reaching implications for Greek society. These include financial consequences as well as important effects on the socialisation of men and in the propagation of gender, sexual, racial and international stereotypes. Conscientious objection has an important role in challenging many of these structures. Whilst this subject is large, here we will attempt to give an overview of some of them.

The economic role of conscription

The Greek army is not a 'conscript army' since the officers are professionals - the conscripts are used merely as unpaid labour to sustain the military institutions. The army provides only the very basics for survival, so that conscripts need financial assistance from their families. When families can't afford this, the army often grants the conscript 'postponement of service on the basis of psychiatric disorder'. The conscript can then go home and work, but at the enormous cost of psychiatric stigmatisation. 'Middle class' conscripts sustain an even heavier loss of earnings, but they are in a much better position to absorb the financial cost.

"It has become utterly obvious that it takes much more courage to declare Conscientious Objection than to enter national service"

Most of the parental financial assistance is spent in the vicinity of army camps, away from hometowns. Conscription thus functions to the detriment of parents and to the benefit of specific provincial societies. Recent moves to reduce conscription have therefore been strongly resisted by the parasitic economy surrounding army bases. In addition, conscripts are removed from the general labour force so that conscription artificially lowers unemployment figures.



Conscription and the 'Hellenic-Christian' ideology

Greeks are indoctrinated to see the army in an effectively sacred role. Junior school children are taught to believe that God *actually sent* St. Constantine, the first Byzantine Emperor, a vision of the Cross on the eve of a major battle, together with the inscription "In this you will be victorious". The dominant 'Hellenic-Christian' ideology still sees the Greek army as Saviour of the Race. Conscription is therefore portrayed as a sacred (as well as practical) duty. Those who conscientiously object are then stigmatised as traitors of all the highest ideals. The religious right, spearheaded by high-ranking Orthodox priests, constantly promotes this ideology. This is very effective whenever Greeks feel under threat, which is often.

The socialisation of men through conscription

Conscription constructs 'men' out of Greek 'boys'. Let's hear a characteristic statement from an officer admonishing a new recruit who was 2 minutes late. The officer shouted at the recruit in front of a woman petty officer and some conscripts: "When a Russian tart is waiting for you to fuck her, are you late? If you're not late then, how dare you be late now?" This vignette summarises the grotesque insults, racism and sex-

ism that conscripts suffer. All this seethes behind a persona of political correctness publicly displayed by the army.

Conscription is supposed to help 18-year-olds to 'fly the nest', to learn teamwork and responsibility. In reality, the army keeps conscripts dependent and utterly institutionalised. The army is where Greeks learn how to exploit others in order to get out of duty or danger. Obtaining an advantageous post is a prime example: In wartime, it's the poor boys that become canon-fodder while most of the rich ones sit in offices. Conscription trains men in setting up bullying hierarchies and rituals. One example is so-called 'Seniority', whereby new recruits are worked to exhaustion and ritually humiliated by those further into their term of service. Greek men realise that although the written rules are on the surface fair, the real, unwritten rules are grossly abusive. They learn that they can't beat such a system, only join it.

Abuse of 'friend' and 'foe' becomes worse the more conscripts are exposed to conflict. Along Greece's 'threatened' northern border, would-be-immigrants captured trying to enter Greece are often grossly humiliated and treated as slaves by Greek conscripts. The captives are 'only' Albanians, fair game for anyone socialised in Greek military racism. In more 'civilised' units, bullying is 'lite', e.g. chasing new recruits and ripping off parts of their clothing. It is therefore unsurprising that research shows that conscription precipitates psychotic disorders. Conscripts suffer various mental disorders, but the military frequently diagnose these damaged young men as 'Maladjusted'. The clear implication is that the 'maladjusted' isn't man enough for military life and is often medically discharged. He will have to declare this 'medical' status to any future public employment agency.

Conscription and the social construction of sexuality

Conscription socialises men into gendered roles. Greeks are taught that they must 'protect women'. 'Protection' has a specifically sexual aspect: it is against Turks (mainly) who would invade, rape "our women" and "make us into yusufakia" (child sex-servants). Thus conscientious objectors are often faced with the indignation of female relatives: "Will you not join the army to protect me from the

Turks?' often with explicit mention of the danger of rape. All this has a socially corrosive effect: femininity is positioned as a family possession requiring violent defence by socially obedient men.

In the Greek popular imagination, soldiering is construed as preventing boys from becoming effeminate, thus protecting them from homosexuality. In reality much homosexual sentiment is aroused amongst conscripts. Sometimes it is displayed, e.g. by enactments of anal sex between clothed conscripts. However, it is simultaneously heavily denied: conscripts homophobically accuse each other of 'faggotry', flaunt their 'manhood' by frequenting lapdancing clubs and organise porn-video viewing sessions within camps. They learn to sing of invading Turkish villages and raping the villagers. On the other hand, conscription puts immense strain on men's real-world sexual relationships. Partners suffer enforced, prolonged separations from conscripts whose very mentality becomes alienated by the gendered military socialisation. Ensuing splits are very sad and promote further malignant gender stereotypes: e.g. conscripts whose girlfriends leave them often talk of 'all women being unfaithful tarts'. The strain on relationships is even worse for conscientious objectors. Partners perceive the grossly punitive 'alternative service' that the Greek state imposes as the choice of the COs themselves and therefore an affront on the relationship. They have to endure increased separation & economic hardship. Many of the healthiest relationships break up.

The social implications of conscientious objection

Greek COs have broken through the stereotype of 'cowardice'. It has become utterly obvious that it takes much more courage to declare Conscientious Objection than to enter national service, where numerous mechanisms exist to dodge danger & duty. Amnesty International, the European Parliament and many other international organisations have called for conscientious objection to become a Right in Greece, gravely embarrassing the Greek Government. They are gradually influencing the Greek people to regard CO as a legitimate stance and not as treason. Conscientious Objection by a few military men during recent wars (Yugoslavia, Iraq) has seriously challenged the 'sacred' role of the army. Greek involvement in those wars is extremely unpopular, but CO by serving personnel remains quite illegal. This situation forced the media to inform the wider public about CO and to provide unprecedented publicity and support for the views of established COs.

Greece is likely to develop a fully professional volunteer army within a few years. This would eliminate personal conscription, at least in the years until the next major war. However Greek COs still have a long struggle ahead for their rights to be respected, for the stigma and discrimination against them to stop and for Greek militarism to come to an end.

Michael Moutoussis

WRI Annual Seminar

War Resisters' International and the Myrtle Solomon Memorial Trust
in cooperation with
Korea Solidarity for Conscientious Objection (KSCO)
Solidarity for Peace and Human Rights (SPR)
World Without War, and WRI Korea:

PEACE IN NORTH-EAST ASIA
International Seminar, 26th-29th June 2005
@ Bongdo Buddhist Centre, Seoul, Korea

International participants: \$200 incl food & accommodation

Join activists from all over the world to discuss peace in North-East Asia, in particular issues of "national security", nonviolent alternatives and a peace movement strategy for the future.

Register online at <http://www.wri-irg.org/news/2005/regform.htm> or call the office on +44 207 278 4040

The History of CO Struggle in Greece

Compulsory military service was introduced in Greece by the Constitution of 1911. A year later Greece was engaged in consecutive wars (two Balkan wars, the First World War and the Campaign in Asia Minor), which lasted a decade. During the final two years of this decade there was a vast movement of desertions from the Greek Army, due essentially to the long period of mobilization (there were conscripts who were called up in 1911 and not released until 1923). There aren't known cases of desertion for ideological reasons at that time.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Over the next 60 years nobody except the Jehovah's Witnesses contested the compulsory military service. The Military Courts were condemning the Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors to extremely long penalties - it was common for a Jehovah's Witness to stay 10-15 years in a military jail. Throughout the Civil War (1946 - 1949) some of them were given the death penalty and shot (Ioannis Tsoukaris on February 11, 1949 and Georgios Orfanidis on March 2, 1949). The last Jehovah's Witness who was condemned to death was Hristos Kazanis (1966), but under the international pressure, his penalty was reduced to 4 years in prison. Another Jehovah's Witness, Vasileios Karafatsas was assassinated on 23 June 1971, whilst he was being transferred from one prison to another.

The compulsory military service and the preponderance of the army in Greek society were contested in the beginning of the 1980s. Three years earlier (in September 1977), sustained pressure by the Council of Europe had obliged the Greek government to vote in a law providing for Jehovah's Witness COs, according to which they would either serve 4 years of unarmed military service or would be condemned to 4 years imprisonment. The movement for the respect of the human rights and civil liberties of conscripts preceded the first debates on the right to refuse military service. Whilst the parties of the Left were very suspicious of conscientious objection, the young ecological movement, a part of the anarchist movement and some of the thousands of draft evaders living abroad initiated serious discussion on the issue. Throughout this decade, the "Oikologiki Efimerida" (Ecologist Journal) and the "Arnoume" (I refuse) became the main contributors to the debate on conscientious objection and anti-militarist culture.

Ideological CO

In December 1986, Michalis Marangakis publicly declared himself a conscientious objector for ideological reasons. His declaration, a real manifestation of anti-militarism, was the turning point for the CO movement in Greece. He was arrested three months later and condemned to 4 years in prison, later reduced to 26 months



Top: Demonstrators in Greece protest against the authorities' failure to recognise the right to CO (before introduction of Law 2510/97 in 1998).

Bottom: 1995: Protestors gather outside the Greek Ministry of Defence in solidarity with conscientious objector Nikos Karanikas who was in prison at the time.

at appeal. Shortly after this, Thanassis Makris suffered an identical fate: he was condemned to 5 years in prison, reduced to 18 months at appeal. Both were released after having served two thirds of their respective penalties

The arrests of Michalis Marangakis and Thanassis Makris and their struggle for the respect of the right to conscientious objection provoked an unprecedented movement of international solidarity. Both endured a series of long hunger strikes (Michalis Marangakis did three of 71, 50 and 20 days respectively whilst Thanassis Makris did two of 55 and 33 days), which finally resulted in the government giving up and releasing them.

International solidarity

During this period of three years, the Greek Ministries for National Defence and for Foreign Affairs were receiving hundreds of letters from abroad every day, demanding the recognition of the right to conscientious objection and calling for the release of Michalis Marangakis and Thanassis Makris. (Indeed, the President of the Republic of Greece confessed during a meeting with representatives of the Association of Conscientious Objectors in February 1990 that during 1988, as Minister for Foreign Affairs, he was receiving 600 protest letters per day!) This campaign was the result of the combined efforts of Amnesty International, the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection and War Resisters' International.

In Greece the Committee for Solidarity With Conscientious Objectors organised hundreds of meetings as well as several demonstrations all over the country. In just one year more than 20 people declared themselves ideological COs. Thanks to the actions of Michalis Marangakis and Thanassis Makris we overcame the fear of being imprisoned and forced the government, the political parties and even society to face the reality of conscientious objection.

The overwhelming international solidarity shown to Greek conscientious objectors forced the government to extend the possibility

of unarmed military service to all COs (February 1988) and some months later, to present a proposal for a law recognising the right to conscientious objection and introducing an alternative civilian service, the length of which should be double that of military service. However, that proposal was never presented to Parliament.

During the 1990s, fear of an intense international campaign made the Greek government reluctant to arrest ideological COs. (Although the Jehovah's Witnesses who presented themselves to Military units and refused to wear uniform were regularly sentenced to 4 years in prison). However,

arrest warrants were pending and, under pressure from the Police, most CO's lived quasi-clandestinely. They had (and still have) no right to a passport and had (and still have) to change address in order to avoid arrest. Police officers regularly visited their parents' homes and threatened them. Between 1990 and 1997, only three ideological COs were arrested: Nicos Maziotis and Pavlos Nathanail (both anarchists) in 1991 and Nicos Karanikas in 1995. Although the trials of Nicos Maziotis and Pavlos Nathanail took place during a period of nationalistic paranoia and both of them had rejected any kind of civilian service, they were only given suspended sentences of 1 year in prison. Some months later Nicos Maziotis was arrested again, but after a 50 day hunger strike he was released. Nicos Karanikas was condemned to 5 years in prison, but this was later reduced on appeal to 1 year suspended sentence.

Legal recognition

On June 6, 1997 the Greek Parliament voted in Law 2510/97 which introduced a substitute civilian service 18 months longer than the military service. This was the start of a new era, with conscientious objectors struggling for the respect of their rights and the reduction of the length of the substitute civilian service. The continuing prosecutions against Lazaros Petromelidis are a consequence of this struggle.

Yannis Chrysosverghis

The Association of Greek CO's supports conscientious objectors in Greece. They were officially formed in 1991 and have been instrumental in effecting changes in Greek CO law and practice.

They can be contacted at: Association of Greek COs Tsamadou 13, 10683 Athens; tel +30 6944542228; fax 2104622753; email greekCO@hotmail.com; website: www.omhroi.gr/SAS/

Donate to War Resisters' International!

How to make a donation to WRI?

- by **standing order** which enables us to plan but let us know (see bank details overleaf)
- in **USA** by arranging for regular donations to be sent through your bank's bill payment service
- by **giro transfer** to War Resisters' International, in **Euros** to Bank of Ireland, IBAN IE91 BOFI 9000 9247 41 35 47 in **£ sterling** to Unity Trust Bank, IBAN GB11 CPBK 0800 5150 07 32 10
- by **credit card** - complete details in the next column or use our web facility <http://wri-irg.org>
- by **cheque**, in **£, US\$, or Euros**, payable to "WRI".
- (**UK only**) by Charity Aid voucher (CAF), made out to Lansbury House Trust Fund (to request such vouchers, write to: Charities Aid Foundation, Kings Hill, West Mailing, Kent ME19 4TA, or visit www.CAFonline.org)
- (**USA only**) by sending a tax deductible donation - make checks payable to the A.J.Muste Institute

Payment by credit card

Please **debit my credit card** for the amount of £/US\$/EUR..... (delete currency as appropriate)

Credit card Visa/Access/Mastercard/American Express (delete as appropriate)

Card number: _____

Expiry date: ____/____

Name on card:

Signature:




Billing address (if different from overleaf)

.....



WRI merchandise

You can order merchandise from War Resisters' International by filling out this form and sending it to War Resisters' International, 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1 9DX, Britain – together with a cheque made out to War Resisters' International in £,€,US\$. Or order online at <http://wri-irg.org/shop/shop-uk.htm>. All prices include postage.

No	Description	UK	Europe	World
_____	1-9 'Broken Rifle' badges per badge	£1.20	€2.25	US\$2.75
_____	10-90 badges per 10	£8.80	€14.00	US\$18.25
_____	100 plus badges per 100	£76.10	€117.50	US\$144.00
_____	 <i>Housmans Peace Diary 2005</i> and <i>Housmans World Peace Directory</i> ISSN 0957-0126, ISBN 0 85283 260 5	£7.95	€12.00	US\$12.00
_____	CONCODOC report: <i>Refusing To Bear Arms</i> (1998) A World Survey of conscription and conscientious objection to military service.	£55.30	€87.00	US\$115.25
_____	Emily Miles: <i>CO Guide to the UN Human Rights System</i> (WRI and Quaker UN Office Geneva, 2000)	£11.40	€19.00	US\$25.50
_____	<i>Resistance and Reconstruction</i> (Institute for Total Revolution, Vedcchhi 1988)	£3.50	€7.25	US\$11.50
_____	Devi Prasad & Tony Smythe: <i>Conscription: A World Survey</i> (WRI, London 1968)	£3.30	€7.00	US\$11.00
_____	Brian Martin et al:  <i>Nonviolent Struggle and Social Defence</i> (WRI, London 1991)	£5.95	€10.50	US\$14.00
_____	 Mitzi Bales, ed: <i>Opening Doors to Peace: A Memorial to Myrtle Solomon</i> (WRI, London 1991)	£3.85	€7.00	US\$9.25
_____	Peter Brock: <i>Testimonies of Conscience</i> (privately printed, Toronto 1997)	£3.85	€7.00	US\$8.75
_____	Donation	£ _____	€ _____	US\$ _____
Total		£ _____	€ _____	US\$ _____

Name: _____
 Address: _____

 Date: _____ Signature: _____

Please send this from with your cheque to:
 War Resisters' International, 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1 9DX, Britain
 For payments by credit card, please use our webshop at wri-irg.org!

War Resisters' International reports to the United Nations

When the UN Human Rights Committee announced their plans to examine human rights abuses in Greece, WRI saw an opportunity to get CO issues on the international agenda and significantly raise the profile of the Greek struggle against militarism.

WRI produced a comprehensive report on conscientious objection to military service in Greece detailing numerous human rights shortfalls. The report describes the legal situation in Greece vis-à-vis conscription and CO before outlining the problems and discriminatory practices that the current law causes. It focuses on violations of internationally recognised standards, in particular UN resolutions and uses article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR) as its benchmark.

Some of the main concerns raised by the report include the punitive length of the substitute service, the exclusion of professional soldiers from applying for CO status and the loss of civil and personal rights suffered by CO's in Greece. Importantly, the report highlights the fact that it is standard procedure in Greece for CO's to be repeatedly tried and imprisoned for the same offence of draft evasion - a practice which violates



WRI's Kat Barton presenting at the UN Photo: John Miller

international law. With the use of case studies, the report is able to illustrate the harsh treatment of CO's by the Greek authorities thus adding a human dimension to a complex topic.

The report was presented to the UN Human Rights Committee on the opening day of their 83rd session at the UN office in New York. WRI staff member Kat Barton addressed the Committee: speaking about the problems facing Greek CO's and urging the Committee to consider the issues when looking at human rights standards in Greece. This consultation with NGO's is an important and necessary part of the work of the Committee, and certainly a worthwhile exercise for WRI in terms of

influencing Greek policy on CO. Having examined the human rights situation in Greece, the Committee distributed a press release outlining their main concerns and Greece's subsequent response. It was clear from this document that CO issues feature quite highly in the minds of some of the Committee members, who criticised the Greek government saying that "the right of conscientious objectors had not been complied with nor had it conformed to the norms of article 18 of the Covenant (ICCPR)". We hope that given this, Greece will now move forward and identify specific changes it intends to implement with regards to CO. Indeed, already on 1st April, the Military Court in Athens ruled that Jehovah's Witness and former Russian army conscript Sergey Gutarov would be allowed to apply for the substitute civilian service despite having previously served in the armed forces.

Kat Barton

"Conscientious Objection To Military Service in Greece: Human Rights Shortfalls" is available online at www.wri-irg.org/news/2005/greece05a-en.htm or can be requested from the office.

Greece-Cyprus Relations

Cyprus, a tiny divided island in the eastern Mediterranean is a military minefield. Even after accession to the EU, no country in the world - with the exception of Korea - has seen its territory amassed with such a deadly array of weaponry with possible catastrophic consequences for the inhabitants. 40000 occupying Turkish forces and another few thousand Turkish-Cypriot soldiers face a few thousand Greek-Cypriots conscripts and Greek soldiers, with British troops and bases and a few thousand UN peace keepers guarding the ceasefire line.

Since 1974 with the Coup by the Greek Junta and the local EOKA B fascists and the Turkish

military invasion, Cyprus has remained divided by the Green line. From the buffer zone, a kind of no man's land in the middle, one can see both sets of young soldiers with their respective "national" symbols. They look exactly the same: their features are the same; their youth, their boredom, their guns and those awful green uniforms are all the same.

Last year, on the 24th April, following a long period of negotiations, the UN proposed a comprehensive plan to resolve the problem. Greek-Cypriots voted "NO" whilst the Turkish-Cypriot "YES", 64%, has raised the stakes even higher. In the past it was Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots who objected to a solution! Not all is lost however; the path to peace and reconciliation cannot be halted for long.

The "Cyprus problem" is certainly not new. Cyprus has a strategic position at the centre of three continents, close to the oil producing Middle-East and with a highly valued location for various regional imperial projects. The "unsinkable aircraft carrier" of the near Middle East has long been a desired station-point for various world powers. However, there is also another equally deadly dimension: nationalism and irredentism - the two main communities instead of looking towards each other, look towards their respective "mother countries". It is time to move on towards a new peace activism. Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots must show courage by attempting to work towards a second referendum and build the bridges of trust,

understanding and good will. The NO vote reflected to a large extent the feeling of insecurity, uncertainty and fear within the Greek Cypriot population. These fears need to be properly addressed if we are to have better chance next time.

In the meantime imagination, action and initiative need to build trust and cooperation between the two divided communities. A vital measure would be to demand an immediate reduction of all troops leading to the full demilitarisation of the island. The military industry and the proponents of hate ideology and nationalism are opposed to such a move. In addition, a number of other initiatives for peace and reconciliation must now be strengthened. Such measures must not, however, be mere tactical manoeuvres for media and marketing purposes; they must be serious, robust and legitimate. This is the time for peace activism and genuine imaginative common action. Trade unions, women's groups, youth groups, citizens action groups and NGOs must work together at this critical moment to overcome all the "state" and "ethnic" boundaries. This is the best guarantee for freedom and security, over and above any legalistic and international guarantees, which are also of course welcome.

A new impetus to peace and reconciliation activism is sought and all energies must be devoted to building the trust we've lost over the years. Peace keeping in Cyprus can only be successful if it leads to the complete demilitarisation of the island.

Nicos Trimikliniotis

War Resisters' International
supporting and connecting war resisters all over the world
 Please send your donation today to support the work of WRI - Thank You!

I want to support WRI: (Please tick at least one)

I enclose a donation of £/US\$/EUR..... to WRI

Please send me a receipt

I have completed credit card details overleaf

I will set up a monthly/quarterly/yearly (please delete) **standing order** to War Resisters' International

In Britain to Unity Trust Bank, account no: 5072 7388 Sort Code: 08-60-01 for £

Eurozone IBAN IE91 BOFI 9000 9247 41 35 47, Bank of Ireland, for **Euros**

Please send me a **standing order** form

I enclose a CAF voucher for £.....

I enclose a check to A.J. Muste Institute for **US\$**.....

Please visit our **webshop** at <http://wri-irg.org> for War Resisters' International publications, Broken Rifle badges, and other WRI merchandise. Thank You!

My address:

Name:

Address:

Country:

Where to send your donation to:

USA only:
 WRI Fund, c/o Ralph di Gia, WRL, 339 Lafayette Street, New York, NY10012

Britain and everywhere else:
 WRI, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX
WRI keeps supporters names and addresses on computer, for our sole use. If you do not consent to this, please let us know