

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 25/015/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 319
13 December 2004

Greece: Petromelidis's Promethean trials

Amnesty International expresses serious concern about the continuing prosecutions in Greece against the conscientious objector Lazaros Petromelidis. He is facing trial again on 16 December on 2 insubordination charges in the Naval Court of Piraeus.

Lazaros Petromelidis, who is the President of the Association of Greek Conscientious Objectors, objected to military service on grounds of conscience in 1992 and has been repeatedly prosecuted since then. He refused to do the alternative service he was offered, as it was located further from his home and of an extremely punitive duration, 7 and a half times longer, than the military service he would otherwise have had to perform.

Petromelidis was previously sentenced to 20 months' imprisonment for insubordination on 12 June 2003, a sentence which was suspended for three years. Should he be sentenced again in the forthcoming trial, the previous suspension of the sentence would be lifted and he would therefore be immediately imprisoned.

Amnesty International considers Lazaros Petromelidis's previous conviction to be in violation of his right to serve alternative civilian service that is not discriminatory or of punitive length. Should he be imprisoned on charges of insubordination the organization would therefore adopt him as a prisoner of conscience and call for his immediate and unconditional release.

"Conscientious objectors must have the right to serve alternative civilian service that is not punitive in nature and length. However, alternative civilian service in Greece, both in law and in practice, continues to be of a punitive nature and to be biased against conscientious objectors," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International urges the Greek authorities to stop prosecutions against all conscientious objectors and to introduce urgently alternative civilian service according to European and international standards and recommendations. In this respect, the organization urges the Greek authorities to amend Law 2510/97 in order to ensure that:

- alternative civilian service is not of discriminatory and punitive length;
- it falls under entirely civilian authority (including in the examination of applications for conscientious objectors);
- conscientious objectors have the right to claim conscientious objector status at any time, both up to and after entering the armed forces;
- the right to perform alternative civilian service can never be derogated from, including in time of

war;
conscientious objectors who carry out trade unionist activities or participate in a strike during their alternative service do not have their right to alternative civilian service or unarmed military service revoked;
conscientious objectors who have legal proceedings pending against them will have their full civil and personal rights recovered, including that of travel outside the country, the right to a passport and identity card, and the right to vote.

Similar concerns have also been raised by the Greek Ombudsman and the Greek National Commission for Human Rights.

Background

Lazaros Petromelidis was recognized as a conscientious objector in November 1998 and was summoned to do 30 months' civilian service at a Health Centre in Kilkis, some 550 kilometres from his home. Under the provisions of that time, military service for a man of his age and family circumstances (married and father of a child) would in effect last four months (given the right to buy exemption from eight months of a 12-month service) and be carried out close to home. He refused to do this service on the grounds that it was of punitive and discriminatory duration and lost his right to conscientious objection on 10 February 1999, and subsequently failed to report for military duty on 26 July 1999 and 3 July 2003. He has thus far been imprisoned three times.

Lazaros Petromelidis is still regularly receiving call-up papers to serve in the military and is repeatedly charged with insubordination because of his refusal, as a conscientious objector, to do military service.

Amnesty International's concerns are described in detail in the report entitled *Greece: To be in the army or choosing not to be: the continuous harassment of conscientious objectors* (AI Index: EUR 25/003/2003).

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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