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PRESS RELEASE

FINLAND: Amnesty International adopts Finnish conscientious objectors as prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate release

Amnesty International has adopted as prisoners of conscience six Finnish conscientious objectors, who have refused to carry out alternative civilian service because it is of punitive length, and is calling on the Finnish government to immediately release them from prison.

Amnesty International is concerned that since the new Military Service Law came into force in 1998, the length of alternative civilian service (395 days), is more than double the length of military service (180 days). This law applies to over 50 per cent of army recruits who choose alternative civilian service.

“The excessive length of the alternative civilian service is punitive and discriminates against people who choose not to perform military service on the basis of their conscientiously held beliefs.” Amnesty International said. “Such a policy is unfair and not in line with international standards on the treatment of conscientious objectors”.

On 2 November, Amnesty International wrote to the Minister of Labour welcoming the announcement of a review of Finland’s civilian service system by Professor Jukka Kekkonenhas. It was reported that the review would take the issue of human rights into account and include a comparative study of systems in other countries.

The six prisoners of conscience who conscientiously objected to the length of their alternative civilian sentence were each sentenced to 197 days’ imprisonment for a “non-military service crime”. Amnesty International is calling on the Finnish government to immediately release the following prisoners and any other conscientious objectors currently imprisoned for refusing to carry out alternative civilian service.

- Tom André **Kettunen**, aged 20, a student, has been imprisoned since 21 September 1999.
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- Nakke **Leppänen**, aged 19, a student, has been imprisoned since 11 October 1999.
- Otto **Salin**, aged 19, a student, has been imprisoned since 4 October 1999.
- Jukka Mikael **Johansson**, aged 20, a student, has been imprisoned since 13 July 1999.
- Kim **Ake**, aged 20, has been imprisoned since 30 June 1999.

ENDS.../

**For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London,
UK, on 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>**