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PUBLIC STATEMENT

GREECE

Right to conscientious objection should be introduced in new Universal Defence Law

Amnesty International wrote today to the Greek authorities criticizing crucial aspects of a draft law on Universal Defence currently under discussion in the Parliamentary Committee for National Defence and Foreign Affairs. The organization is particularly concerned that the new draft legislation contains no provisions for allowing those people who object to the carrying of arms on grounds of conscience to register their objection.

According to the draft bill, the new law will make it compulsory for all women and men aged between 18 and 60 who are not currently serving in the armed forces to complete up to four days a year service in universal defence units. Certain groups of women, such as those who are pregnant or who have children under the age of 12, are to be exempt. Depending on their functions, the units will reportedly come under the authority or supervision of the Ministry of Defence or various other ministries. Members of units will perform a range of functions, such as responding to natural disasters, guarding vital installations and providing first aid.

Amnesty International is concerned that under Article 8 of the draft legislation defence units are to be provided with arms and ammunition *"in cases of war, mobilization or tension or for the purpose of scheduled exercises in peace time..."*. Furthermore, *"Exceptionally and [including] in peace time...arms and ammunition can be supplied to the staff [of the units] in border areas of the country for the undertaking of specific operational missions"*. Failure to report for service will, according to the draft law, be punishable by a period of imprisonment of one month. If the offence is repeated, a punishment of three months' imprisonment will be imposed.

Amnesty International urges all members of the Greek Parliament to vote for the introduction of the right to conscientious objection in the new law and to amend the forthcoming legislation with a view to bringing it into line with international standards and recommendations on the right to conscientious objection.

Should any person be detained or imprisoned under the new legislation solely because they have exercised their right to refuse on grounds of conscience to carry arms or to undertake other duties which are not of a non-combatant or civilian character, Amnesty International will adopt that person as a prisoner of conscience and will call for their immediate release.

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