

PUBLIC

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Prisoners of conscience / Conscientious objectors

29 January 2003

ISRAEL

Hillel Goral (m), aged 18
Noam Bahat, (m), aged 19

The two teenagers named above are conscientious objectors to compulsory military service. At present they are serving their second prison sentence for refusing to enter the Israeli army. Israel has no alternative civilian service and Hillel Goral and Noam Bahat are currently on hunger strike.

Hillel Goral was sentenced to 28 days for refusing to serve in the Israeli army and his second sentence was for the same duration. Noam Bahat was initially sentenced to 28 days for refusing to serve in the army and his second sentence was for 42 days. Both began their hunger strike on 16 January 2003, in protest at the imprisonment and mistreatment of conscientious objectors. They are also protesting Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories. They refuse to wear military uniforms in prison and as a result, are being held in isolation wards at Military Prisons. Hillel Goral is in Military Prison No. 6 near the coastal town of Haifa and Noam Bahat is held in Military Prison No. 4, near Tel Aviv.

When Hillel Goral's lawyer recently visited him in prison, she noticed that his fingers were turning blue and that his body temperature was dropping. At her insistence he was examined at the prison clinic. He consented to an infusion, but otherwise refused several pleas to stop his hunger strike, and declared he would continue as long as he is held in prison.

In 2002, Hillel Goral and Noam Bahat were amongst 300 signatories of the "High School Seniors' Letter" in which teenagers shortly to be conscripted for army service wrote to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. They stated that they would not take part in the oppression of the Palestinian people by serving in the Israeli army. Some of them declared their refusal to serve in the Occupied Territories, while others expressed complete objection to serving in the Israeli army.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International is concerned about the number of Israeli soldiers and reservists detained because of their refusal to perform military service or to serve in the Occupied Territories. In Israel, conscripts who make it known that they are unwilling to serve on grounds of conscience and because they believe that the army is committing human rights violations are imprisoned. However, other conscripts are routinely granted deferral or exemption from performing military service on religious grounds.

There are approximately ten conscientious objectors currently imprisoned in Israel, although the numbers fluctuate daily. The total number of objectors imprisoned since September 2000, when the current Palestinian uprising (*intifada*) began, is more than 180. Some of those imprisoned are young conscript conscientious objectors (COs), while others are army reservists. Recently, the Israeli army has hardened its position towards the conscript COs, and they have been sentenced to repeated terms of imprisonment of between 14 and 42 days each. Some of the young COs are now serving a sixth or even seventh consecutive prison sentence. (For more information see: http://web.amnesty.org/web/web.nsf/pages/IOT_Conscientious_Objectors).

A person who for reasons of conscience or profound conviction arising from religious, ethical, moral, humanitarian, philosophical, political or similar motive may refuse to perform armed service or any other direct or indirect participation in wars or armed conflicts. If imprisoned as a result of his/her refusal and

denied an alternative civilian service of comparable length, Amnesty International would consider this person to be a prisoner of conscience. Israel has no such alternative civilian service. Amnesty International believes that all conscientious objectors should be given the opportunity to present the grounds of their objection to a decision-making body, which is established by law and is impartial and independent.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Hebrew or your own language:

- calling for all conscientious objectors who have been imprisoned to be immediately and unconditionally released;
- urging the authorities to provide all necessary medical care to those on hunger strike.

APPEALS TO:

Shaul Mofaz
Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
37 Kaplan Street
Tel-Aviv 61909,
Israel

Telegram: Defence Minister, Tel-Aviv, Israel
Fax: +972 3 6962757 / 6917915
Salutation: Dear Defence Minister

Brig. Gen. Menachem Finkelstein
Chief Military Attorney
Military postal code 9605
Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)
Israel

Telegram: Chief Military Attorney, Israeli Defense Forces, Israel
Fax: +972 3 5694370
Salutation: Dear Brigadier General

Colonel Deborah Chassid
Commander of Induction Base, Tel-Hashomer
Military postal code 02718
Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)
Israel

Telegram: Chief Military Attorney, Israeli Defense Forces, Israel
Fax: +972 3 7376052
Salutation: Dear Colonel

Maj. General Gil Regev
Head of the IDF Personnel Department
Military postal code 9605
Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)
Israel

Telegram: Head of IDF Personnel Department, Israeli Defense Forces, Israel
Fax: +972 3 5699400
Salutation: Dear Major General

Head of the Incompatibility Unit
Induction base, Tel-Hashomer
Military postal code 02718
Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)
Israel

Telegram: Head of the Incompatibility Unit, Israeli Defense Forces, Israel
Fax: +972 3 7376705

Salutation: Dear Sir

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of Israel accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 March 2003.