

PUBLIC

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Prisoner of conscience

17 September 2004

USA

Abdullah William Webster (m), sergeant

On 3 June, Sergeant Abdullah William Webster was sentenced by US court-martial to 14 months imprisonment for refusing to participate in the war in Iraq on the basis of his religious beliefs. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned for his conscientious objection to participating in war.

Abdullah Webster is a US citizen who has served in the US army since 1985. He had been based in Bamberg, Germany since 2001 from where he was requested to deploy to Iraq between March and April 2003. In September 2003 he submitted a conscientious objector application to secure his release from military obligations in Iraq on the basis that his religion prohibited him from participating in any aggressive war against, or in any oppression or injustice to, Muslims or non-Muslims. He later withdrew this application after receiving advice that it would not be successful.

Abdullah Webster then submitted an application to be reassigned to non-combatant services. Despite this he was ordered to deploy to Iraq in February 2004. Following his refusal on religious grounds he was charged with failing to obey commands from his superior and missing his Brigade's movements. A further application for conscientious objector status was refused on the grounds that his objection was not to war in general but to the Iraq war in particular. According to US Army Regulations, requests for qualification as a conscientious objector will not be favourably considered when such requests are based on objection to a certain war. A second application is currently being considered by the army.

At the court-martial hearing, Abdullah Webster was sentenced to 14 months imprisonment, a bad conduct discharge, suspension of his salary and loss of pension and other benefits. He had been due to retire from service in 2005. He is currently held at the US base in Mannheim, Germany.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International considers a conscientious objector to be any person who, for reasons of conscience or profound conviction, refuses to perform service in the armed forces or any other direct or indirect participation in wars or armed conflicts. This can include refusal to participate in a war because one disagrees with its aims or the manner in which it was being waged, even if one does not oppose taking part in all wars.

Furthermore Amnesty International considers a person to be a prisoner of conscience when they are detained or imprisoned solely because they have been denied or refused their right to register an objection or to perform a genuinely civilian alternative service. They would also be prisoners of conscience if they are imprisoned for leaving the armed forces without authorization for reasons of conscience, if they have taken reasonable steps to secure release from military obligations.

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

- urging that Abdullah William Webster be released immediately and unconditionally, with restoration of his benefits, pointing out that Amnesty International considers him to be prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for his conscientious objection to participating in war;
- explaining that Amnesty International considers that he took reasonable steps to secure his release from military obligations through legal means, including applying for conscientious objector status.

APPEALS TO:

Colonel William H. Haight III
1 ID Engineer Brigade
Unit 27562
APO, AE
09139
USA

Fax: +49 951 300 7685
Email: william.haight@us.army.mil
Salutation: Dear Colonel

Lieutenant Colonel Gerald P. O'Connor
HHC 82nd Engineer Battalion
Unit 27522
APO, AE
09139
USA

Fax: +49 951 300 8612
Email: gerald.oconnor@us.army.mil
Salutation: Dear Lieutenant Colonel

Major David K. Kennedy
Rear Detachment Commander
Unit 27562
APO, AE
09139
USA

Fax: +49 951 300 7685
Salutation: Dear Major

The Honorable Les Brownlee
Acting Secretary of the Army
102 Army Pentagon
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Washington DC 20310-0102
USA

Fax: +1 703 697 0720
Email: les.brownlee@us.army.mil
Salutation: Dear Secretary

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of the United States of America accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 October 2004