

### **Greece: conscientious objectors must not be penalized**

*Legal proceedings against conscientious objector Lazaros Petromelidis should be suspended pending a review of the legal provisions relating to alternative civilian service in Greece, Amnesty International said today.*

*The Military Court of Appeal is due to hear today an appeal against the four-year prison sentence given to Lazaros Petromelidis in April 1999 by the Naval Court of Piraeus on charges of "insubordination in time of general mobilisation".*

*"Should Lazaros Petromelidis be imprisoned following his appeal, we would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience and call for his immediate and unconditional release," Amnesty International said. He was adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience when he was earlier imprisoned between April and June 1999.*

*"The Greek authorities should bring legislation dealing with conscientious objection and alternative civilian service into line with international standards and recommendations," the organization added.*

*In particular, the organization is urging that alternative civilian service should not be of discriminatory and punitive length, that conscientious objectors should have the right to claim conscientious objector status at any time, both up to and after entering the armed forces, and that the right to perform alternative civilian service never be derogated from, including in time of war.*

*"Moreover, current provisions -- which stipulate that conscientious objectors who carry out trade unionist activities or participate in a strike during their alternative service will have their right to alternative civilian service revoked -- should be amended," Amnesty International added.*

#### **Background**

*In 1998 Lazaros Petromelidis, who is aged 39, married and the father of a child, was summoned to do 30 months' civilian service at a Health Centre in Kilkis, some 550 km from his home. He was convicted after refusing to do this*

*service, on the grounds that it was of punitive length. Military service for a man of his age and family circumstances would in fact effectively last four months -- given the right to buy exemption from eight months of a 12 month service -- and would take place near home. Under present legislation, his refusal meant he lost the right to conscientious objection to military service.*

*A previous appeal hearing in this case, which took place in June 1999, was adjourned. A ruling by the State Council to which Lazaros Petromelidis has had recourse is awaited, and changes to provisions of law no. 2510/1997 on civilian service, are reportedly being studied in the light of recommendations made by the Greek Ombudsman. However, no amendments have been made as yet.*

*\ENDS*

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