

PRIORITY

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Medical Concern

7 October 1991

GREECE

Giannis SMARAGDIS (aged 24)

Amnesty International is concerned about the health of conscientious objector Giannis Smaragdis. Giannis Smaragdis, an adopted prisoner of conscience, has been imprisoned since March 1989 for refusing to perform compulsory military service on religious grounds. He was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in June 1989 and is currently imprisoned in Kassandra Agricultural Prison. As a Jehovah's Witness he is opposed to any type of military service.

In September Giannis Smaragdis was diagnosed as suffering from Hodgkins Disease (a form of cancer affecting the lymph nodes, spleen and other lymph tissue). His lawyer applied to the Public Prosecutor in Thessaloniki for Giannis Smaragdis' release and was informed that he could only be released by an appeal court. It is likely to be between one month and several months until his case comes up for appeal. Amnesty International is concerned that Giannis Smaragdis should be released immediately so that he can start receiving treatment for his condition as soon as possible. The earlier therapy is started in such cases, the greater the patient's chances of survival. Amnesty International considers all imprisoned conscientious objectors to be prisoners of conscience and appeals for their release, but considers that the case of Giannis Smaragdis should be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are some 400 conscientious objectors imprisoned in Greece, the majority are Jehovah's Witnesses. Amnesty International considers all of them to be prisoners of conscience. Greek law does not permit conscientious objectors to perform alternative civilian service instead of compulsory military service, which lasts up to 24 months. Conscientious objectors are allowed to carry out unarmed military service double the length of military service, but for most of them to serve in the armed forces in any capacity whatsoever is irreconcilable with their beliefs.

The right to refuse military service for reasons of conscience has been recognized by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. These bodies have recommended that states refrain from imprisoning conscientious objectors and instead grant them the right to perform alternative civilian service of non-punitive length. A draft law announced in 1988 by a former Greek Government which provided for alternative civilian service double the length of military service was never passed.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing grave concern about the case of conscientious objector Giannis

Smaragdis, imprisoned in Kassandra Agricultural Prison, who was diagnosed as suffering from Hodgkins Disease in September;

- appealing that in view of the seriousness of his condition, Giannis Smaragdis should be released from prison immediately so that he can start treatment;
- pointing out that any delay in releasing Giannis Smaragdis will reduce his chances of survival.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis
Office of the Prime Minister
Megaron Maximou
Herodou Atticou Avenue
106 74 Athens
Greece

Dear Prime Minister

Telegrams: Prime Minister Mitsotakis, Athens, Greece
Faxes: +30 1 322 44 66, +30 1 724 0764

Mr Ioannis Varvitsiotis
Minister of National Defence
Ministry of National Defence
Holargos (Pentagono)
Athens
Greece

Dear Minister

Telegrams: Defence Minister Varvitsiotis, Athens, Greece
Telexes: 216780 rkqa gr
Faxes: +30 1 646 55 84

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of Greece in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 November 1991.