



EXTERNAL

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## **CYPRUS: IMPRISONMENT OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS RESUMES**

On 2 March conscientious objector Sideris Georgiou was jailed after being sentenced by Nicosia Military Court to four months' imprisonment for refusing to perform reservist exercises. As a Jehovah's Witness Sideris Georgiou's religion does not permit him to serve in the armed forces in any capacity whatsoever. Amnesty International considers Sideris Georgiou to be a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate release. A further three conscientious objectors, Panikos Makri, Aristos Aristidou and Filippou Filippou, all of them Jehovah's Witnesses, will be tried during March and April for their conscientious objection.

The right to conscientious objection to military service is recognized by the United Nations and Council of Europe, both of which have recommended that member states provide for civilian service which is not of a punitive nature. There is currently no provision for alternative service for conscientious objectors in Cyprus, although new legislation was passed in January recognizing for the first time in Cyprus the right to have conscientious objections to military service. The legislation, which is not due to come into force until later on in the year, will provide for, among other things, alternative service outside military camps, under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence. Its provisions fall short of international standards in a number of important ways and if it is implemented as it stands, Amnesty International will continue to consider all conscientious objectors who are jailed after refusing the alternative service provided by the legislation to be prisoners of conscience.

Sideris Georgiou is aged 35, married and has two children. In 1985 he served nine months of a 13-month sentence but was released in September of that year when all imprisoned conscientious objectors in Cyprus were released following a decision by the Supreme Court. Sideris Georgiou has his own small carpentry business.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

All men between the ages of 18 and 50 are liable for military service

and men under the age of 50 without dependants are required to participate as reservists in military exercises. Military service normally lasts for 26 months and reservist exercises are held every two to three months and last from between several hours to several days.

Conscientious objectors are sentenced by Nicosia Military Court and serve their sentences in Nicosia Central Prison. Normally those convicted for refusing to perform military service are sentenced to between four and six months' imprisonment. Reservists are generally given prison sentences of between several weeks and four months.

In September 1985 all imprisoned conscientious objectors were released following a decision by the Supreme Court. Although Jehovah's Witnesses continued to be called up, their call-up papers did not specify a date by which they had to present themselves to the military authorities.

In 1989 the military authorities began once again to imprison conscientious objectors. In 1989 Amnesty International was aware of two imprisoned conscientious objectors, one a Jehovah's Witness and one a conscientious objector on moral and political grounds, the first such conscientious objector in Cyprus known to Amnesty International. During 1990 some thirty Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned for conscientious objection to military or reserve service. A number of these men had already served prison sentences prior to the amnesty of 1985. During 1991 some 20 conscientious objectors were sentenced and imprisoned.

In January 1992 legislation providing for unarmed military service lasting 34 months and "unarmed military service...without a military uniform and outside military camps" lasting 42 months was passed by the House of Representatives (Cypriot Parliament). The legislation is due to come into force later on in the year. The legislation falls short of international standards in a number of respects:

1Amnesty International is concerned that the unarmed military service without a uniform outside military camps does not appear to be civilian at all and has asked for clarification on this point from the Cypriot authorities. In order to conform with international standards conscientious objectors should have the possibility of performing an alternative civilian service which is completely civilian and under civilian control. This means service which has no connection directly or indirectly to military aims or operations.

2Amnesty International considers the service "outside the military camp" to be punitive in length. The factors which Amnesty International takes into account when assessing whether the length of alternative service is punitive are the existence of periods of reservist exercises for those performing military service, the comparative working hours of those performing military and alternative service and comparative

living conditions, for example whether or not those performing the alternative service are able to live at home. The legislation envisages that conscientious objectors who refuse to take part in reservist exercises should perform alternative service of equivalent length to that performed by serving reservists. This was one of the factors which led Amnesty International to conclude that the alternative service was punitive.

3Under the new legislation people already serving can opt for alternative service if they develop conscientious objections after joining the armed forces. Amnesty

International is, however, concerned that this right is cancelled during periods of emergency or general mobilization.

4The legislation does not state whether the alternative service is open to conscientious objectors on religious grounds only or whether it also applies to other types of conscientious objectors. Amnesty International has urged the Cypriot authorities to ensure that alternative service applies not only to religious objectors but that it is also open to conscientious objectors on ethical, moral, humanitarian, philosophical, political or similar grounds.

Amnesty International is calling on the Cypriot Government to release Sideris Georgiou immediately, to drop charges against other conscientious objectors and to introduce alternative civilian service of a completely civilian character and under civilian control, which is of comparable length to military service and which is also available to conscientious objectors on ethical, humanitarian, philosophical, moral, political or similar grounds.