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Amnesty International

**International Secretariat
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 8DJ
United Kingdom**

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@ADOPTION OF THREE PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE - FRANCE

The cases of Erik LECHARDOY, Jean-François LEFORT and Nikolas PADRONES

Erik Lechardoy, Jean-François Lefort and Nikolas Padrones, from the Basque region of Southern France, are currently serving sentences of between 10 and 13 months' imprisonment as a result of their refusal, on grounds of conscience, to perform military service. They are 'total objectors', that is, they did not apply for conscientious objector status and reject alternative civilian service as well as military service. All three base their objection to both military and civilian service on their anti-militarist and political beliefs. They reject the institution of the army in itself and also consider the French political authorities and the French army to be forces of occupation in the Basque region; they support the eventual creation of an autonomous Basque state composed of the Basque provinces of both France and Spain.

In autumn 1991 they supported an anti-militarist campaign organized in the Basque region of Southern France by publicly declaring their refusal to perform military service. At the beginning of December 1991, when they were due to report to barracks to commence their military service, they returned their call-up orders (ordres de route) to offices of the gendarmerie¹ in Bayonne.

All three were arrested shortly before or during a march against military service which took place in the Basque region of France between 2 and 8 May 1992, although it had been banned by the regional authorities on 30 April 1992. On 13 May they began a hunger-strike in protest against their imprisonment.

Erik Lechardoy, a 20-year-old broadcaster in a local radio station, was arrested on 30 April 1992, as he was leaving his place of work in St Jean Pied de Port. He was escorted to an army barracks in Périgueux where he refused either to put on military uniform or to perform any military service. He was subsequently transferred to Gradignan civilian prison, near Bordeaux, and on 20 May 1992 a court in Bordeaux (Tribunal correctionnel de Bordeaux) sentenced him to 10 months' imprisonment for 'insubordination' (refus d'obéissance), a charge which had been brought as a result of his refusal to obey an order to put on military uniform. He has entered an appeal against the sentence. On 3 June he was transferred to Fresnes prison hospital, near Paris, as a result of the hunger-strike which he commenced on 13 May.

Jean-François Lefort, 21 years old, from Arbonne, was arrested in the environs of the village of Larressore on 4 May 1992, in the course of the anti-militarist march. He was then apparently escorted to a military barracks in Poitiers where he refused either to put on military uniform or to perform any military service. On 5 May he was transferred to a civilian prison in Poitiers and on 27 May 1992 a court in Poitiers (Tribunal correctionnel de Poitiers) sentenced him to 13 months' imprisonment for 'insubordination' (refus d'obéissance), a charge which had been brought as a result of his refusal to obey an order to put on military uniform. He has entered an appeal against the sentence. According to Amnesty International's information he has been on hunger-strike in Poitiers prison since 13 May.

Nikolas Padrones is 21 years old and from Bayonne. He was arrested at Domezain on 7 May while participating in the anti-militarist march. He was taken to a military barracks in Charente where he refused either to put on military uniform or to perform

¹ A law enforcement agency responsible to the Ministry of Defence

any military service. He was subsequently transferred to the civilian prison of Gradignan, near Bordeaux, and on 20 May 1992 a court in Bordeaux (Tribunal correctionnel de Bordeaux) sentenced him to 10 months' imprisonment for 'insubordination' (refus d'obéissance), a charge which had been brought as a result of his refusal to obey an order to put on military uniform. He has entered an appeal against the sentence. On 3 June he was transferred to Fresnes prison hospital, near Paris, as a result of the hunger-strike which he began on 13 May.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S CONCERN

Amnesty International takes no position on whether or not states should provide for conscription and does not oppose the right of a state to request a citizen to undertake alternative civilian service. Nor does it agree or disagree with the motives of conscientious objectors. The organization works for the release of individual objectors who fall within its guidelines on conscientious objection (see attached) and works for the development of law and procedures which make due provision for conscientious objectors.

Amnesty International believes that an essential component of the right to conscientious objection to armed service is that alternative service should not be imposed as a punishment for such objection. In December 1991 the French parliament gave final approval to a bill on

national service which reduced the length of military service from 12 to 10 months and the length of civilian service from 24 to 20 months. As the length of civilian service in France therefore remains twice that of ordinary military service, Amnesty International considers that it does not provide an acceptable alternative to military service. Those like Erik Lechardoy, Jean-François Lefort and Nikolas Padrones, who are imprisoned as a result of their rejection, on grounds of conscience, of both services are considered, therefore, to be prisoners of conscience.