

Human Rights Council, 43rd Session

Geneva 28th February 2020, General Debate on Item 2 - Oral update by the High Commissioner

Oral statement delivered by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Madam High Commissioner,

The number of situations of concern which you listed this morning is chilling.

The ongoing conflict in Syria is a dire humanitarian and human rights disaster. In Iraq, as you reported, more than 450 peaceful protesters have in recent months been killed by the security forces. Likewise, in Chile unarmed protesters have been seriously injured. You did not mention France, where the police reaction to the *gilets jaunes* protests has been disproportionately violent.

IFOR has serious concerns about the situation in Cameroon, supports your call for prompt investigation, leading to prosecution of the perpetrators of incidents like the massacre in the North-West of the country two weeks ago. Meanwhile we welcome the positive news from your discussions with the government last autumn, and hope that the pledges made will bear fruit.

We strongly support the reconciliation process in South Sudan to end violence, stabilize the country and enhance human rights.

Our concerns about the situation in Eritrea were voiced in the interactive dialogue last Wednesday. We also have an ongoing concern about military service in both parts of the island of Cyprus, which, although today peaceful, houses perhaps the densest population of military personnel (belonging to six separate armies!) of anywhere in the world. Three conscientious objectors to military service in the Turkish-occupied north of the island have now filed cases with the European Court of Human Rights.

In Colombia, despite the legal recognition of conscientious objection to military service, irregular recruitment practices still persist. Last September, Brayan Gonzales Blanco voluntarily presented himself at the military recruitment office in Bogota to inquire about the process for registration as a conscientious objector. His identity documents were impounded and he found himself transported to immediate incorporation in Battalion 13 in the municipality of Ubaia. On leave, he contacted IFOR's partner organisation *Asociation Colectiva de Objetores y Objetoras de Conciencia-ACOOOC* about the process of registration as a conscientious objector. They recommended that he should not simply abscond but should return to his unit and follow the correct procedures. This he did, but as soon as he returned to the Battalion at the beginning of this month he encountered harassment from superiors and peers so severe as to put his psychological well-being at risk. His application for release is still under review.

The "batidas" under which young men were hoovered from the streets into military vehicles, are now a thing of the past in the major cities. But Colombia is a vast country. One fears that in the remote rural areas forced recruitment is still the norm, and that few if any of the victims know even of the possibility of claiming conscientious objector status.

We call on your Office in Bogota to continue to monitor reports of irregular recruitment practices from all parts of the country.

Thank you