

**Human Rights Council, 46th Session
Geneva, 4th March 2021**

**Item 2: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the freedom of religion or belief
Oral statement delivered by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation.**

Madam President,

IFOR thanks the Special Rapporteur for his thematic report¹.

The right to Conscientious objection to military service is inherent to the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

However, conscientious objectors continue to be imprisoned in various countries, such as Turkmenistan², Singapore³, Eritrea⁴, Tajikistan⁵, Israel⁶, for instance, and this constitutes a violation of international human rights law.

We encourage and support the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief in his long-standing efforts for the immediate and unconditional release of all imprisoned conscientious objectors.

IFOR urges the respect of international standards for the exercise of the right to conscientious objection.

In Colombia, for instance, the competence to recognise the right to conscientious objection lies with the same authority that carries out military recruitment, which denotes a lack of objectivity and impartiality that delegitimises its exercise through a process that prioritises evidence over substance. This procedural treatment generates gaps of inequality and discrimination between those who can provide evidence backed by an ecclesiastical authority and those who do not have this possibility. An example is given by the response⁷ to the conscientious objector Sergio Sáenz⁸, who based his declaration on non-religious beliefs.

Thank you.

¹ Report on Countering Islamophobia/Anti-Muslim Hatred to Eliminate Discrimination and Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/HatredAndDiscrimination.aspx>.

² <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2025552.html>.

³ <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/singapore/jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison/>.

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26439&LangID=E>.

⁵ https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2629.

⁶ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-conscientious-objector-released-from-military-prison/>.

⁷ Response to File No. 531228 dated 26 January 2021.

“A través del cual le exigen (i) número de resolución de la entidad emitida por el Ministerio del Interior. (ii) certificado de existencia y representación de la Institución a la que pertenece; (iii) certificado de vinculación del líder religioso que emite certificación, (iv) no se indica fecha ni certificados de sacramentos recibidos en el marco de la religión católica; (v) sede donde regularmente se congrega, actividades específicas que realiza, horarios, programa de estudios, (vi) números telefónicos de feligreses que indiquen bajo la gravedad de juramento que han sido testigos de sus actividades religiosas (iv) demás documentos y elementos de prueba (fotos, videos etc..) que acrediten la sinceridad de sus convicciones; es decir, que sean claras, profundas, fijas y sinceras en que fundamenta su solicitud.”

⁸ His request was not processed because he had to belong to a legally constituted church that would certify it, and he had to have the testimony of two or more members of the congregation who, under oath, would certify his status as a conscientious objector within the church.