

**Human Rights Council
Geneva, 18th December 2020**

**Interactive Dialogue on the oral presentation of the report
on the situation of human rights in Ukraine.**

Oral statement delivered by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation¹.

International Fellowship of Reconciliation - IFOR thanks the High Commissioner and her office for the report (on the situation of human rights in Ukraine) and expresses concern about the ongoing violations of the right to conscientious objection to military service.

Alternative service in Ukraine has a punitive and discriminatory character and it is hardly accessible. There are information from the ground about the current case of about 24 Pentecostals² conscientious objectors who are unable to start alternative service because there is not an available employment³.

Another item of concern is Bill 3553⁴, regarding military service and registration, adopted by the parliament in the first reading. It introduces new measures which forecast a negative impact on the rights and freedom of citizens.

IFOR would like, finally, to draw the attention of the Members of this Council and of the High Commissioner to the case of Ukrainian journalist and pacifist Ruslan Kotsaba who is again under trial⁵ because of a video posted in 2015 to express opposition to the military mobilization for armed conflict in eastern Ukraine⁶. He has already spent over 500 days under arrest for his expression of anti-war thoughts and is accused again of treason and obstructing military operations.

As already highlighted by IFOR⁷, “freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a non-derogable right”, alike freedom of expression, (“and it continues to apply regardless of a situation of armed conflict”).

¹ According to the meeting participation rules, the statement has been delivered by video-message.

² In Hoshcha Raion of Rivne Oblast.

³ Employment has to be suitable to the restrictive legal regulations of alternative service.

⁴ It has been proposed by President of Ukraine and is titled "On the amendments to several legislative acts of Ukraine concerning improvement in some aspects of conducting military service and military registration".

⁵ In Kolomyia City District Court of Ivano-Frankivsk Region.

The High Specialized Court on Civil and Criminal Cases in 2017 quashed the acquittal and ordered a retrial. Then several judges and local courts recused from the case; the court ordered to return formal accusation for further investigation, but the order was quashed by the appellate court; and now, judges Kalyniuk, Berkeshuk, and Veselov will examine 58 witnesses of the supposed political impact of Ruslan's video blog and pass their judgment.

⁶ Ruslan Kotsaba was arrested on 7th February 2015 in Ivano-Frankivsk, 130 km south-east of Lviv, after he posted a video describing the conflict as “the Donbas fratricidal civil war”. He also expressed opposition to military conscription of Ukrainians to take part in the conflict. He was then named as Amnesty International’s first Ukrainian prisoner of conscience in five years. He has already spent 524 days under arrest and was duly acquitted in 2016.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/04/ukraine-suspicious-deaths-need-credible-investigations/>

⁷ Oral statements delivered by IFOR at the 45th session of the Human rights Council, on October 1st, during the ID with the High Commissioner on the findings of OHCHR report on the situation of human rights in Ukraine.