



Conscience and Peace Tax International

Internacional de Conciencia e Impuestos para la Paz

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN

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ORAL STATEMENT BY CONSCIENCE AND PEACE TAX INTERNATIONAL
Delivered by **Derek Brett**, Thursday 9th June 2011

ADOPTION OF UPR REPORT ON ESTONIA

Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI) welcomes the acceptance by Estonia of the recommendation that it should “Ensure that the right of conscientious objection to military service is upheld, and clarify the grounds for acceptance or rejection of such claims”¹

This recommendation followed concerns expressed by the Human Rights Committee in July 2010 about the very low rate of acceptance of applications to perform alternative service (fewer than one in five in the years 2007 and 2008), and closely mirrors the wording of their concluding observation.² During the examination by the Committee of Estonia's third report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Estonian delegation explained that most people opted for military service because of its shorter duration.³ Indeed, at the time alternative service lasted twice as long as military service, a discrepancy as discriminatory and punitive as might be found anywhere in the world. All the more reason to be surprised that the sincerity of those who came forward as conscientious objectors and applied to perform such service should have apparently been treated with such suspicion.

CPTI welcomes the amendment to the Defence Forces Service Act which came into force on 1 July 2010, and which has the effect of equalising the duration of military and alternative at 8 to 12 months, depending on educational background.⁴ We look forward in the course of follow-up to hearing the precise criteria used in assessing claims of

¹ A/HRC/17/17, Para 77.77 (recommendation by Slovakia).

² CCPR/C/EST/CO/3, 4th August 2010, Para. 14.

³ CCPR/C/SR.2716, 20th July 2010 (meeting of 13th July), para 54.

⁴ Ibid, para 9.

conscientious objection, and to seeing statistics showing a more reasonable acceptance rate, in which context we would remind Estonia that in 1998 the Commission on Human Rights, in a resolution adopted without a vote, welcomed the practice of those States which accepted claims of conscientious objection as valid without inquiry.⁵

On a related topic, CPTI regrets that Estonia has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and welcomes its acceptance of a number of firm recommendations that it do so.⁶ We consider it important to examine the extent to which the information given in successive Child Soldiers Global Reports⁷ concerning the activities of the youth wings of the National Defence Leagues remains true, and is compatible with the Optional Protocol.

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⁵ Resolution 1998/77, OP2.

⁶ A/HRC/17/17, Paras 77.6, 77.9, and 77.10.(Recommendations by Ecuador, Spain and Argentina).

⁷ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Child Soldiers Global Report 2004, p236 and Child Soldiers Global Report 2008, p.140.