

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL REPORT EXTRACTS

REPUBLIC OF FINLAND

ANNUAL REPORT 2007

Head of state: Tarja Halonen
Head of government: Matti Vanhanen
Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes
International Criminal Court: ratified

Conscientious objectors to military service were imprisoned.

Conscientious objection to military service

The length of the civilian alternative to military service remained punitive and discriminatory. Conscientious objectors were obliged to perform 395 days of civilian service, 215 days longer than military service. In October a Ministry of Labour working group proposed shortening the civilian service and recognizing conscientious objection in times of war or other public emergency.

- AI considered 11 imprisoned conscientious objectors to military service to be prisoners of conscience. Most served sentences of 197 days for refusing to perform alternative civilian service.

Violence against women

In January the Minister of Social Affairs and Health admitted to AI the need for increased co-ordination among government ministries and for the creation of an action plan on preventing violence against women. No such plan had been produced by the end of 2006.

An updated AI survey in May found that Finnish municipalities lacked the political will, co-ordination, expertise and resources to eradicate violence against women, although a few were doing pioneering work.

An official study in December found that 43.5 per cent of women in Finland were victims of physical or sexual violence or threats of violence by men.

Trafficking in human beings

Under the 2005 national action plan against trafficking, a detailed system for aiding and protecting victims of trafficking was devised, but funding remained uncertain. A special residence permit for victims of trafficking was created under the Aliens Act, but the granting of permits to victims was ordinarily conditional on their co-operation with the authorities.

Finland ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, and signed the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

Asylum

Accelerated asylum-determination procedures under the Aliens Act allowed too short a time for claims to be considered thoroughly and for asylum-seekers to exhaust all avenues of appeal.

An increasing number of people were granted temporary residence permits, resulting in a corresponding increase in the number denied the right to work or family reunification, and allowed only restricted access to education and social and health care.

Unfair residence permit procedures

Residence permits were denied solely on the basis of information from the security police withheld from the applicant. However, in June, Kuopio Administrative Court quashed a refusal to grant a residence permit because the immigration authorities had refused to disclose to the applicant information provided by the security police, denying him a fair hearing. An appeal by the authorities to the Supreme Administrative Court was pending.

- In January, Pakistani national Qari Muzaffar Iqbal Naeemi was granted asylum. In 2002 his request for a renewal of his residence permit had been denied. In 2003 his deportation had been ordered on the basis of information that remained undisclosed.

ANNUAL REPORT 2006

Seven conscientious objectors to military service were imprisoned; they were prisoners of conscience. Little coordinated action was taken to combat widespread violence against women.

Conscientious objection to military service

The length of alternative civilian service remained punitive and discriminatory. Conscientious objectors were obliged to perform 395 days of civilian service, 215 days longer than the usual military service. In addition, the option of alternative service was restricted to peacetime. Conscientious objectors imprisoned for refusing to do civilian service because of its punitive length were prisoners of conscience.

AI continued to urge the authorities to reduce the length of alternative civilian service in line with internationally recognized standards and recommendations. The Labour Minister proposed shortening the alternative service, but in June the government decided not to amend the law.

- Seven conscientious objectors were known to have been imprisoned during the year. They received sentences of between 126 and 197 days for refusing to perform alternative civilian service. The length of their sentences equalled half of their remaining civilian service time.

Violence against women

Violence against women continued to be widespread. The last extensive study on the issue, conducted in 1998, showed that 40 per cent of women in Finland had been victims of physical or sexual violence or threats of violence by men, and 22 per cent of married women and women cohabiting with men had been victims of physical or sexual violence or threats of violence by their partner. The government failed to follow up effectively on a national project on the prevention of violence against women that was carried out between 1998 and 2002.

During 2005 AI and 18 other non-governmental organizations called for an inter-ministry action plan for the prevention of violence against women and submitted detailed recommendations. A reply received in February from the Prime Minister implied that there was no overall action plan but that the issue of violence against women was being included in other government programmes. In November AI reiterated its call for an overall action plan.

AI also conducted a survey of the work of Finnish municipalities on eradication of violence against women. It found that in general this work lacked political will, coordination, expertise and resources, although a few municipalities were doing pioneering work.

Unfair residence permit procedures

The immigration authorities reportedly refused to grant some residence permits solely on the basis of information provided by Finland's Security Police (Suojelupoliisi, SUPO). The applicants were not allowed to see the information, which they could therefore not contest.

- Qari Muzaffar Iqbal Naeemi, a Pakistani national resident in Finland since May 1997, remained uncertain of his future. He had been denied a renewal of his residence permit in September 2002 and issued with a deportation order in March 2003 on the basis of secret information supplied by SUPO. In April, AI raised his case with the authorities, but it had still not been resolved by the end of the year.

ANNUAL REPORT 2005

Nine conscientious objectors to military service were adopted as prisoners of conscience. International monitoring bodies expressed concern about aspects of Finland's human rights record.

Conscientious objection to military service

The length of alternative civilian service remained punitive and discriminatory: all conscientious objectors were required to perform 395 days of alternative civilian service, 215 days longer than the majority of military recruits. AI continued to urge the authorities to reduce the length of alternative civilian service in line with internationally recognized standards and recommendations. Despite repeated assurances by the relevant minister that she would do everything in her power to shorten the length of alternative service, AI was not aware of any recent government proposal to review the legislation.

- Nine conscientious objectors were adopted as prisoners of conscience during 2004. They received prison sentences of between 169 and 197 days for refusing to perform alternative civilian service. They all cited the punitive length of service as a reason for their refusal.

International scrutiny of human rights record

In June the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) published a report on its September 2003 visit to Finland. The government had previously authorized publication, in October 2003, of the CPT's preliminary observations.

The CPT found that there was no coherent set of regulations on the use of force and means of restraint authorized during the deportation of foreign nationals, and recommended that detailed instructions on the procedures to be followed be issued without delay.

- The CPT detailed the case of a Ukrainian family, a married couple and two children aged 11 and 12. In 2002 they were deported back to Ukraine at the third attempt after an operation lasting three days. Before being deported, they were held in a custody unit for aliens in Helsinki where sedative drugs were administered without proper examination by a doctor and without proper records being kept. The CPT described the approach taken in this case as unacceptable.

In November the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), after considering Finland's periodic report, noted with concern that Roma still faced discrimination in housing, education, employment and access to public places. It also reiterated its concern over the failure to settle the question of Sami rights to land ownership.

The HRC expressed concern about people held in pre-trial detention in police stations, noting a lack of clarity about their right of access to lawyers and doctors.

The HRC regretted that the right to conscientious objection was acknowledged only in peacetime, and that the civilian alternative to military service was punitively long. It reiterated its concern at the fact that the preferential treatment accorded to Jehovah's Witnesses had not been extended to other groups of conscientious objectors.