

Human Rights Council, 38th Session

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Agenda Item 6 – Adoption of the UPR report on Israel

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The International Fellowship of Reconciliation is deeply disturbed that in the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review Israel again received no recommendations on the subject of conscientious objection to military service. Slovenia's intervention in the first cycle remains the sole time that the issue has been raised with Israel in the UPR.

And yet Israel is one of the few states which routinely imprisons conscientious objectors for their refusal to perform military service. Conscientious objectors have no right to apply to perform an alternative civilian service. The Israeli Defence Force does have the discretion to grant exemptions, including on grounds of conscience, but it alone decides whom it will consider for such exemptions. There is no civilian oversight of the process, and no consistency in the outcome. The few token exemptions granted seem cynically designed solely to feed the misleading narrative which Israel sells to its more uncritical supporters, in the USA and elsewhere.

Israel's treatment of conscientious objectors, men and women, represents a blatant attempt at coercion to change their religion or beliefs. They are condemned in the first instance to relatively short sentences in military prison, but on release are ordered immediately to report for service: failure to do so leads to a further imprisonment, which may be longer. This cycle can be repeated ten or more times until the objector relents, is discharged with a pscho-social disorder diagnosed by a military psychiatrist, or for "persistent disobedience" - either way carrying a lifelong stigma, - or, very rarely, until the objection is recognized.

With its concentration on the occupation, this council contrives to overlook this grave pattern of human rights violations affecting Jewish Israeli citizens, particularly those who oppose the aggressive militarism of their government.

IFOR urges all states not to let this issue go unmentioned in the fourth UPR cycle.