

Human Rights Council, 39th Session

20th September 2018

Agenda Item 6 – Adoption of the UPR Report on **AZERBAIJAN**

Statement delivered by **Derek BRETT**

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Mr Vice-President,

When in the mid 1990's Azerbaijan was admitted to the Council of Europe one of the conditions was that within three years it should adopt legislation giving conscientious objectors to military service the option to perform an alternative civilian service. It duly included a reference to this in its new constitution, but has never adopted implementing legislation. This year two Jehovah's Witnesses, Emil Mehdiyev and Vahid Abilov, have been convicted for their refusal of military service. Three more cases are currently under way.

Azerbaijan's neighbour Armenia was for many years in a similar position, but three years ago Armenia brought in an alternative service law which the Vienna Commission of the Council of Europe certified was in accordance with its international human rights obligations.

The International Fellowship of Reconciliation calls upon Azerbaijan to do likewise. The two countries have effectively been at war for almost thirty years, and obviously have little patience for those who refuse to fight.

But Azerbaijan should be realistic. What use in its armed forces is someone who feels it is morally wrong to fire a gun? Why not give such people the opportunity to serve their country in another capacity?

Finally, Mr Vice-President, may I apologise for not having been here to speak on Turkmenistan earlier this morning. However the statement I would have delivered will be accessible on IFOR's website, www.ifor.org