

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND ALTERNATIVE SERVICE IN ARMENIA

Imprisoned Conscientious Objectors—As of 30 June 2005, there are 16 male Jehovah's Witnesses in prison in Armenia for their conscientious refusal of military service on religious grounds. Another one, Areg Avanesyan, is in prison in Nagorno-Karabakh. A law on alternative service took effect in Armenia on 1 July 2004. However, this law is not a genuine alternative civilian service law. Article 6 states that issues related to alternative service are dealt with by the military. Article 13 mentions that workers are assigned by the Military Conscription Committee. Article 14 says that the alternative service call-up is organized and supervised by the military.

“Armenia undertook on joining the Council of Europe to pardon conscientious objectors serving prison terms. [The Assembly] expresses its indignation at the fact that twenty or so young people who refuse to perform military service are still in prison. It therefore demands that they be released immediately by presidential pardon . . .”

PACE Resolution 1361 (2004)

Action Required—That Armenia comply with its commitments to the Council of Europe regarding conscientious objectors. The Council requirements include that member states make provision for alternative civilian service based on the European standard, as mentioned in Opinion 221 (2000) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Jehovah's Witnesses in Armenia appeal to the authorities regarding conscientious objectors in order to:

- Provide a genuine alternative civilian service that is not under the control, auspices, or supervision of the military.
- Release all conscientious objectors in harmony with PACE Resolution 1361 (2004).
- Return or issue a Passport or Residential Registration to those conscientious objectors who have completed their prison sentence, in compliance with PACE Resolutions 1361 and 1374, dated 20 September 2004.

July 2005