

**APPEAL TO ARMENIA, TURKMENISTAN AND SOUTH KOREA IN
BEHALF OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IMPRISONED AS
CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS**

ORAL STATEMENT BY THE
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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Jehovah's Witnesses are known worldwide for respecting the principle of Christian neutrality. As such, they are peace-loving citizens and object to any form of military or military-controlled service.

In the OSCE sphere of influence, most countries have introduced an alternative civilian service option where applicable. However, there remain some dark spots, including Armenia and Turkmenistan, as detailed in our written submissions.

This is our seventh intervention before the OSCE regarding the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in **ARMENIA**. Nevertheless, Armenia continues to arrest and imprison male Jehovah's Witnesses of military age for their conscientious objection to military service on religious grounds. During the past 12 years, 288 young men who are Jehovah's Witnesses have been imprisoned as conscientious objectors to military service. Although the government of Armenia has organized non-military work assignments, alternative service is under military control and supervision. Thus the law, as well as its implementation, fails to meet European standards. Therefore, for conscientious objectors, the alternative service law in its present form is not an option. Currently, there are 82 Jehovah's Witnesses who are in prison for their conscientious refusal of military service on religious grounds. Most of them are now sentenced to prison terms of two-and-a-half or three years, while one young man of Nagorno-Karabakh, Areg Avanesyan serves a 4-year sentence since February 2005 in the Shushi Penal Institution in Armenia.

Since June 2007 **TURKMENISTAN** has resumed prosecution of conscientious objectors. A number of young Christian men have been given suspended sentences of up to two years.

The OSCE 1990 Copenhagen Document states in its article 18.4 that the participating States "agree to consider introducing, (...), various forms of alternative service, which are compatible with the reasons for conscientious objection, (...) and of (...) civilian nature, (...) and of a non-punitive nature;"

As this OSCE standard is also the aim towards to which observer States should strive, we feel compelled to denounce the situation of the almost 1,000 Jehovah's Witnesses who are conscientious objectors currently in prison in **SOUTH KOREA** where alternative service is not an option. Since 1939 more than 12,000 conscientious objectors have been imprisoned. Despite the decision of the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations in favor of two Jehovah's Witnesses who were wrongfully imprisoned for refusing military service, the Korean government has failed to implement a solution for Jehovah's Witnesses.

In addition to inviting all parties to a side event that we have organized on this theme, we appeal to these countries, in harmony with international standards, to:

1. Pardon the conscientious objectors presently in jail;
2. To institute a purely civilian service which is not under military supervision; and
3. To have a dialogue with our representatives who are present at this meeting.