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PRESS RELEASE

Greece: International Conscientious Objectors' Day was marked by prosecuting four more conscientious objectors

"Greece continues to convict people for exercising their freedom of thought, conscience and religion", Amnesty International said today as conscientious objector Nikos Baltoukas was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment and in previous days Jehovah's Witnesses Andreas Anastasiou and Makedonas Alexandridis were sentenced to six months' imprisonment for refusing to perform their military service on religious grounds. Conscientious objector and Jehovah's Witness Georgios Koutsomanolakis remains imprisoned awaiting his trial on 23 May.

"The right to refuse to perform military service is a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and it's high time Greece respected it," Amnesty International stated.

Nikos Baltoukas, 37, had served his military service in the Greek army in 1990-91 but when he was called up for reservist military service on 31 October 2004 he refused to report for reasons of conscience. He was thus charged with insubordination and was sent to trial today in the Military Court of Xanthi, where he was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment. Andreas Anastasiou had also served his military service in the Greek army, but later became a Jehovah's Witness, so when he was called up for reservist military service he refused to report for reasons of conscience. Anastasiou was sentenced yesterday, 17 May, to six months' imprisonment for insubordination and disobedience by the Military Court of Larissa. Amnesty International notes that recently, on 7 April, the Military Appeal Court in Athens acquitted conscientious objector Dionisis Avlastimidis, who had also been charged with insubordination for not serving his reservist military service. Amnesty International urges that all conscientious objectors, including Nikos Baltoukas and Andreas Anastasiou, be treated in the same way, without discrimination.

Makedonas Alexandridis had served his military service in the Russian army. Later, he became a Jehovah's Witness, so when the Greek army called him to report for military service he asked to serve alternative civilian service instead. However, this is not allowed under Greek law 2510/97 for those who have already served in the armed forces. Makedonas Alexandridis was sentenced on 10 May to six months' imprisonment for disobedience by the Military Court of Ioannina. Amnesty International notes that again recently, on 1 April, the Military Court of Athens acquitted religious conscientious objector Sergey Gutarov, who had also been charged with insubordination for exactly the same reason, and calls for all conscientious objectors, including Alexandridis, to be treated in the same way, without discrimination.

Georgios Koutsomanolakis, 45, was charged with insubordination in 1979, at a time when there was no alternative civilian service in Greece, because as a Jehovah's Witness he refused to serve military service for reasons of conscience. He was arrested on 12 May 2005 on the island of Rhodes and on 16 May he was transferred to Korydallos prison, Athens, where he remains imprisoned until his trial on 23 May by the Military Court of Athens. Amnesty International has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

On 15 May, International Conscientious Objectors' Day, Amnesty International published a new report entitled: *"Greece: Punished for their beliefs: how conscientious objectors continue to be deprived of their rights"* (AI Index: EUR 25/007/2005), in which the organization expresses its grave concerns about the continuing prosecutions against conscientious objectors in Greece and the fact that Greek legislation on conscription and conscientious objection, particularly Law 2510/97, continues to fall below international standards.

The organization accordingly calls for amendments to Greece's legal framework to ensure that alternative civilian service is not of discriminatory and punitive length, that it falls under entirely civilian authority (including in the examinations of applications for conscientious objectors), that conscientious objectors have the right to claim conscientious objector status at any time, both up to and after entering the armed forces, and that the right to perform alternative civilian service can never be derogated from, including in time of war. Moreover, Amnesty International also urges an amendment to current provisions which stipulate that conscientious objectors who carry out trade unionist activities or participate in a strike during their alternative service would have their right to alternative civilian service or unarmed military service revoked. The organization also calls on the Greek authorities to ensure that conscientious objectors recover their full civil and personal rights, including that of travel outside the country, the right to a passport and identity card, and the right to vote.

"We urge the Greek authorities to comply with European and international standards and recommendations and put an end to all prosecutions, imprisonments and violations of the human rights of conscientious objectors."