

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: EUR 25/05/92
Distr: UA/SC

UA 119/92 Legal Concern

9 April 1992

Greece

Anastasios (Tasos) Georgiades

Amnesty International is concerned about the imprisonment for the second time on 4 April of Jehovah's Witness minister Tasos Georgiades after he refused to perform military service. Since 1988 when new legislation on military service was introduced in Greece, religious ministers of recognized religions have been entitled to exemption from military service. Tasos Georgiades, whose case was the subject of an Amnesty International document, "Greece: Religious discrimination - minister imprisoned" (AI Index: EUR 25/03/92, February 1992), was imprisoned for the first time on 20 January after his application for exemption from military service as a religious minister was turned down by the military recruiting office on the grounds that the the Jehovah's Witness faith was not a recognized religion. As a Jehovah's Witness, Tasos Georgiades is opposed to performing any form of military service.

On 16 March Athens Military Court acquitted Tasos Georgiades of insubordination and ordered his release acknowledging that the Jehovah's Witness faith was a recognized religion. He was released the following day on a 15-day leave permit in order to obtain the necessary papers from the military authorities to exempt him in future from further call-up. On 2 April, however, the recruiting office informed him that they would not grant him exemption from military service and called him to appear at Nafplion Military Camp on 4 April to perform military service. He complied with these orders and was immediately put in the disciplinary section of the camp. He is due to be transferred to Avlona Military Prison on 14 April. It is likely he will have to stand trial again but a trial date has not yet been set.

Amnesty International believes that Tasos Georgiades has been imprisoned for the exercise of his right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and on the basis of discriminatory treatment by the military authorities against Jehovah's Witness ministers and calls for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience. It is concerned by the failure of the military recruiting authorities to abide by the decision of the military court.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Military service is compulsory in Greece. There is no provision for civilian service for conscientious objectors. At any given time 350 to 400 conscientious objectors are in prison for refusing to perform military service. The vast majority are Jehovah's Witnesses. Amnesty International considers all of them to be prisoners of conscience and has repeatedly called on successive Greek Governments to release them and to pass

legislation which would enable them to perform civilian service of non-punitive length.

Tasos Georgiades is the fourth Jehovah's Witness minister known to Amnesty International to have his application for exemption rejected by the military authorities since 1988. The other three, Daniel Kokkalis, Dimitris Tsirlis and Timothy Kouloubas, all now released, were adopted as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International. In all of their cases the Council of State (the highest administrative court in Greece) ruled that they should have been exempted from military service under Law 1763/88 and emphasized that the Jehovah's Witness faith was a recognized religion.

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RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- calling for the immediate release of prisoner of conscience Tasos Georgiades;
- expressing concern about the continued religious discrimination by the military authorities against Jehovah's Witness ministers;
- expressing concern that the verdict of Athens Military Court on 16 March which acquitted him of insubordination and recognized that he was entitled to exemption from military service as a religious minister has been ignored by the recruiting authorities.

APPEALS TO

1) Mr Ioannis Varvitsiotis
Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
Holargos (Pentagono)
Athens, Greece

Telegrams: Defence Minister Varvitsiotis, Athens, Greece
Faxes: (+ 30) 1 646 55 84
Telexes: 216780 rkqa gr
Salutation: Dear Minister

2) Mr Antonis Samaras
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
1 Akadimias
106 71 Athens, Greece

Telegrams: Minister of Foreign Affairs, Athens, Greece
Faxes: (+ 30) 1 36 09 716
36 24 195
Telexes: 218213 ypex gr
216593-4 ypex gr
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: Diplomatic representatives of Greece in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 May 1992.