



UN Human Rights Council, 56th Session
Geneva, July 3rd 2024

**Item 4: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur
on the situation of human rights in Belarus**

Oral statement delivered by War Resisters International, in collaboration with Connection e.V.

Mr. Vice-President,

Madam Special rapporteur,

War Resisters International (WRI) thanks you for your detailed report [on the very concerning situation of human rights in Belarus] and for your efforts in fulfilling this sensitive mandate.

We are genuinely concerned by the “overviewing of how repressive laws and policies have purged civic space [by selectively] targeting grass-roots civil society organizations”¹ and human rights defenders like Olga Karatch who assists conscientious objectors and is currently seeking protection in Lithuania with her family, as many others who oppose to war and mobilization.

It is alarming the continuous increasing militarization of society and [in particular the Belarusian military training programs for] youth and children.²

As reported, “the Government [of Belarus] continues to actively support the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine”³ and more recently it has been registered a deployment of tactical Russian nuclear weapons [in Belarus].⁴

WRI and its partner Connection e.V. are very concerned by the ongoing violations of the human right to conscientious objection to military service and the reintroduction of the death penalty [in the country]. The Criminal Code has several articles including criminal liability for evading military conscription.⁵ Additionally, as reported by Our House, there is a repressive practice of *public show trial* of draft evaders.⁶

¹ A/HRC/56/65, par. 6. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/072/84/pdf/g2407284.pdf?token=Xx1oBT25PpSRReFqe7o&fe=true>

² <https://president.gov.by/ru/documents/ukaz-no-160-ot-4-maya-2022-g>

³ A/HRC/56/65, par 14.

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belarus-has-started-taking-delivery-russian-tactical-nuclear-weapons-president-2023-06-14/>

⁵ “Evasion from call-up to military service on the mobilisation (Art. 434), evasion of regular call-up to active military service (Art. 435), failure of a reservist or person liable for military service to appear for military training or special classes (Art. 436), avoidance of military registration by a conscript or person liable for military duty (Art. 437).” European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, Annual report, p. 46-47. https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2024-05-15-EBCO_Annual_Report_2023-24.pdf

⁶ Ibidem, p. 47.

“On 10 March 2023, the Military Commissariat of Brest and the Brest region organised a mobile court session for trying an 18-year-old boy who refused to serve in the Belarusian army. The defendant failed a medical examination without a valid reason and did not appear at the military registration and enlistment office on the date specified in the summons. During the trial he admitted his guilt in full, explaining that he “did not want to go to the army because he was afraid of being sent to the war”. The court found the defendant’s fear unconvincing and sentenced the young man to a fine of 60 basic units (2,220 rubles). This court session was also used by the authorities both for propaganda

Several conscientious objectors have to leave the country and seek for protection elsewhere, [mainly in Europe] and are at risk of deportation [back to Belarus where they may be] even at risk of death penalty.

WRI and Connection e.V. call on this Council to ensure the universality and non-derogability of human rights and the protection of those whose life is threatened in the country of origin -as the Special Rapporteur has just emphasized-, and urge Belarus to respect children rights, conscientious objectors' rights, and the General Assembly resolution [77/222] on death penalty.⁷

Thank you

purposes and to intimidate young people: high schoolers and draft-age youths from local schools were gathered for it. On 13 March 2023, the Hrodna Regional Court started hearing the case against 19-year-old Anita Bakunovich, former customs officer Mikalai Kuleshou and army evader Yehor Kurzin. All of them were detained near the Lithuanian fence while trying to cross the border illegally. Yehor Kurzin was accused of illegal border crossing as well as draft evasion. On 10 April 2023, a mobile court session was held at the military enlistment office of Rechytsa and Loyev districts. Students from local schools were forcibly brought along with their parents, as well as young individuals who are expected to serve in the army. Such public trials related to Article 435 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (evasion of military service) are becoming increasingly common in Belarus, as the unwillingness to join the army becomes widespread in the country." Ibidem, p. 53.

⁷ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/764/50/PDF/N2276450.pdf?OpenElement>