

Olga Karach

My name is Olga Karach, I am a human rights defender and in Belarus I face the death penalty for my human rights activities.

We help conscientious objectors and deserters, but it's very challenging. They're not welcome anywhere. Today, those who refuse to take up arms and do not want to go to the front - conscientious objectors and deserters - have become criminals.

Formally, Belarus has not joined the war against Ukraine, although the monitoring of the Belarusian army's activities conducted by "Our House" within the framework of the Belarusian campaign "No Means No" indicates that the Belarusian army has undergone extensive preparation for an invasion of Ukraine, which continues to this day.

There is only one strategy to prevent the danger of opening a Second Front in Ukraine from Belarus, and that is full-scale and extensive for Belarusian men who refuse to join the army and take up arms.

After the start of Russia's war against Ukraine, as it became evident that Belarusian troops might be compelled to take up arms and fight against Ukrainians, many current conscripts and professional soldiers were horrified by this prospect and attempted to flee. Consequently, the number of Belarusian conscientious objectors started to increase.

The situation of Belarusian men who refuse to take up arms and join the army can be described as dire and desperate, both within Belarus and beyond its borders. In Belarus, the death penalty has been introduced for desertion under the pretext of "state treason," and the legislation on military deferments has been tightened, significantly reducing the opportunities for Belarusian men to avoid military service if it contradicts one's beliefs.

While there is formally an alternative civilian service in Belarus, it applies only to a very limited segment of religious men. In 2022 alone, about 400 criminal cases were initiated against Belarusian men who refused to join the army, and all these judicial proceedings were classified, leading to significant challenges in accessing information about criminal prosecutions concerning conscientious objectors in Belarus. At present, the Belarusian police have declared approximately 5,000

Belarusian men wanted for attempting to evade military service in Russia or European Union countries.

Furthermore, for Belarusian conscientious objectors, it is practically impossible not only to avoid military service or evade imprisonment for their refusal to serve in the army but also to seek refuge in other countries.

Russia extradites Belarusian conscientious objectors back to Belarus, where they are imprisoned.

Lithuania considers Belarusian conscientious objectors a "threat to national security of Lithuania" and deports them back to Belarus with a ban on entry to the European Union for the next five years. Unfortunately, based on official Lithuanian sources and media, as well as cases in which our team has provided legal assistance, we know that around 1700 Belarusians were summarily declared persona non grata in Lithuania in 2023 under the guise of "threat to national security of Lithuania". These individuals, both men and women, were deemed a threat solely because, at some point in their lives, going back as far as the 1990s, they had served in the Belarusian army (even if only as an accountant) or attended a cadet academy. In this regard, we are compelled to speak about political manipulations and numerous human rights violations against Belarusian conscientious objectors to military service in Lithuania.

In other countries, Belarusian conscientious objectors also face significant challenges in attempting to legalize their status and avoid military service.

In other words, it is nearly impossible for a Belarusian individual to exercise his right to conscientious objection in the current circumstances.

We help these people, for which we ourselves face pressure and repression.

Today I want to say: No to war.

Helping conscientious objectors costs less than any missile, but for some reason no one does it.

What's the way for Putin and Lukashenko to be involved in the war without having soldiers?

But they will have soldiers. This will be the result of desperation and hopelessness, as few are helping conscientious objectors to be saved from the military.

We want to preserve human life. The simplest approach is to ensure that those who do not wish to take part in war are not forced to do so, thereby safeguarding human rights, particularly the rights of conscientious objectors.

Let's help deserters and conscientious objectors together.

Let's stop the war through humane and non-violent means.

Let's save those who haven't been killed yet—children, women, and the elderly. Let's save them before it's too late.

Let's finally talk about peace, read news about peace and take military toys away from children, because war is not a game, neither for children nor for adults.

We need peace here and now.