CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION BULLETIN

UPDATES ON CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO MILITARY SERVICE IN TURKEY
ABOUT CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION BULLETINS

We, as the Conscientious Objection Association (VR-DER), aim to document the current situation on the right to conscientious objection in Turkey with this bulletin. The Conscientious Objection Bulletin will be published periodically during the year.

In doing so, we hope to be able to provide the flow of information needed in the field. We hope that we will increase public awareness of the right to conscientious objection with the help of bulletins which will include applications to our Association, new declarations of conscientious objection and up-to-date information on the court cases of conscientious objectors.

If you want to get more information about our monitoring work, you can contact us on our website, social media accounts and dernek@vicdaniret.org.

WHAT’S IN THE BULLETIN THIS MONTH?

In the first issue of Conscientious Objection Bulletin, November-December 2020, you can find information about the applications for information to our association. VR-DER’s activities, rights violations experienced by conscripts and new declarations of conscientious objection are some of the titles of our first bulletin.
APPLICATIONS TO VR-DER

In November-December, 39 applications were submitted to our association for information. Applicants were those who consulted on the right to conscientious objection, those who wanted to declare their conscientious objection, those who fled from the military and those who were mistreated in the military units. 64% of the applications received came from people who wanted to get information about the right to conscientious objection and 11% of applications came from draft evaders. (The expressions "draft evader", "evader" and "deserter" are used in the newsletter because these people are legally defined as such.)

SUMMARY

- **4%** mistreated in the military
- **7%** new conscientious objection declarations
- **11%** draft evaders
- **14%** those who fled from military
- **64%** those who request information about the right to conscientious objection
WHAT DID VR-DER DO LAST 2 MONTHS?

Our December November-December activities that we left behind, our statements...

13th November 2020: A New Prosecution Has Started Against VR-DER

Due to a news story posted on VR-DER’s official website vicdaniret.org, and social media posts on VR-DER accounts, a new prosecution has been started by the İstanbul Anatolian Public Prosecutor’s Office against the Association. Abdülmelik Yalçın who is a member of VR-DER deposed according to the Turkish Penal Code 301 “insulting the military organization of the state”

Last year another prosecution had been launched against VR-DER and resulted in an acquittal.

1st December 2020: Solidarity With Prisoners For Peace

VR-DER supported War Resisters’ International’s social media campaign for Prisoners for Peace Day on December 1st.

The Association has called for solidarity with conscientious objectors who are behind bars in many parts of the world today.

3rd December 2020: Due Diligence Form For Rights Violations Suffered By Conscripts

"Due diligence form for rights violations suffered by Conscripts" published on vicdaniret.org. The association has urged anyone who has experienced any kind of rights violation due to mandatory military service to fill out this form.
10th December 2020: Conscientious Objection is a Human Right!

On December 10, Human Rights Day, VR-DER called on everyone to exercise this right, emphasizing that “conscientious objection is a human right”. In its statement, VR-DER said “The right to conscientious objection is guaranteed within the scope of freedom of thought, conscience and religion discussed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the Turkish government insists on ignoring this right and not recognizing it. Conscientious objection is a human right”.

19th December 2020: Solidarity with Ukrainian Conscientious Objector Ruslan Kotsaba

VR-DER together with European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO), of which it is a member, called for solidarity with Ukrainian journalist, pacifist and conscientious objector Ruslan Kotsaba. In their statement, EBCO urged the Ukrainian authorities for an immediate and unconditional end to the criminal prosecution against Ruslan Kotsaba.
During November-December, there were many applications to VR-DER via the application form we published on the due diligence of rights violations suffered by people who have been subjected to compulsory military service. We have been reported various rights violations imposed on conscientious objectors, draft evaders and deserters who filled in our form over the course of 2 months.

Among those who filled out the form were many conscientious objectors whose right to education, right to freedom of travel were violated who were dismissed from their work because of their draft evader or deserter status, whose bank accounts were confiscated. We also had people filled in our form who have not yet disclosed their conscientious objection but did not want to serve compulsory military service.
Motivations of conscientious objection

We were reported various motivations for conscientious objection by those who filled in our form. This included, nonviolence, political opinion, ethnic identity, antimilitarism, anti-war. We also had people mentioning health reasons in their motivation to avoid military service.

ADMINISTRATIVE MONETARY FINES

38% of applicants stated that they were issued administrative fines because of being a draft evader or evader (bakaya).

Bakaya means a person who initiate the necessary legal actions to do military service. Their military units are determined by their army recruiting office. The starting date for military service is certain for these individuals but they don’t join their military unit at the necessary time.

In addition, 40% of applicants mentioned they did not know how to appeal the administrative fines. 20% mentioned they had appealed and the legal process was ongoing, 20% mentioned their appeal had been rejected and the fines issues had been finalised. 20% mentioned they did not appeal the administrative fine.
WHAT KIND OF RIGHT VIOLATIONS?

- I got fired.
- I've been tried multiple times on the same charges.
- My right to education has been violated.
- My bank accounts have been confiscated.
- My right to freedom of travel has been violated.
- I can't work in state institutions.
- I can't work with social security.

* Applicants have stated that they have been subjected to multiple rights violations.

Responses to our survey form allow us to document the right violations suffered by people who are subject to compulsory military service, and reveal the phenomenon of civil death they are experiencing.

The rights violations of people who do not want to perform compulsory military service, the persecution they face in their economic and social life amount to conditions of civil death.
10th November 2020: Resul Dündar announced his conscientious objection with a declaration he sent to the VR-DER.

“... Conscience is born of the sense of guilt. In order to feel less guilty about the human deaths caused by wars that still continue in the country once I was living in, I declare my conscientious objection and state that I will not perform “military service” that I’m obliged by the state.”

2nd December 2020: Mustafa Dogan announced his conscientious objection with a declaration he sent to VR-DER.

“This war, these wars have never been my war, I will not be under the command of people I have never known. I will never participate in an armed struggle. I want to live in a country where there is no war and no violence. I don’t want to be imposed any boundaries. I don’t want to kill and be killed...”

8th December 2020: Murat Kızılay announced his conscientious objection with his declaration sent to VR-DER.

“... I will not be put under the command of any army! I refuse to be a cog in this wheel, to wear a uniform, take orders and be part of this hierarchical system, use weapons and learn to use weapons...”