



UN Human Rights Council, 61st Session
Geneva, March 12th 2026

Item 4: ID with Group of Independent Experts on Belarus

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

Mr. President,

War Resisters International (WRI), together with its partner Connection e.V., thanks the Group of Independent Experts for its report¹ which highlights several concerning practices affecting also Belarusian people in exile such as transnational repression, public threats, trials in absentia and labelling civil society organizations as “extremist”.

We are greatly concerned by the support of Belarus to the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and the ongoing violations of the right to conscientious objection to military service [and the public censorship against objectors].

Recent legal amendments have significantly tightened military obligations and increased criminal liability for draft evasion (Law of 17 February 2025; Criminal Code Art. 435). Individuals facing prosecution may now avoid criminal liability by signing a written statement agreeing to perform military service, [effectively creating a coercive practice (“choice without choice”)]. [The right to conscientious objection remains severely restricted, as] alternative civilian service is recognized only for those referring to religious beliefs, excluding secular or pacifist convictions.²

The militarization of children and their exposure to paramilitary training is also alarming³

As previously reported by the Special Rapporteur⁴, repressive laws and policies continue to target grassroots civil society organizations⁵. Those documenting these violations, including *Our House [Centre for Human Rights and Relief]*, have faced transnational pressure, surveillance, threats and cyber-attacks. We have been notified that currently this organization and its director Olga Karatch, supporting Belarusian conscientious objectors in exile and in Belarus, are experiencing “de-banking” practices which are also affecting other Belarusian human rights defenders and causing operational difficulties, for instance, in Lithuania.

We welcome the recommendation [of the Group of Independent Experts] to Member States to “Ensure international refugee protection for victims and witnesses [of human rights violations] who have fled or were forcefully expelled from Belarus”⁶ and thus to grant asylum to Belarusian conscientious objectors and human rights defenders, in line with UNHCR Guidelines [on International Protection]⁷.

Thank you.

¹ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/61/57>

² *Constraining Duty: Legal Reengineering of Military Obligation in Belarus (2025)*.

<https://ndbelarus.com/2026/03/10/constraining-duty-legal-reengineering-of-military-obligation-in-belarus-2025/>

³ See <https://ndbelarus.com/2026/02/05/annual-report-systemic-human-rights-violations-in-belarus-denial-of-the-right-to-conscientious-objection-and-forced-military-service/>

⁴ [A/HRC/59/59](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/59/59)

⁵ [A/HRC/56/65](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/56/65), par. 6.

⁶ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/61/57>

⁷ UNHCR, Guidelines on International Protection No.10: Claims to refugee status related to military service within the context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.