



## THE RIGHT NOT TO TAKE UP ARMS Interview with Olga Karatch, minister for Peace, Belarus, Sept '23

• *Seen from your homeland: is there a way to end the war in Ukraine?* Yes. prevent Belarus from engaging in it. This is the path that any Belarusian woman and man can choose - the path of non-joining the war.

• *Giving asylum to conscientious objectors is cheaper than any weapon?* It is the peaceful path that, for reasons unclear to me, is blocked by all governments. If the Belarusian army enters Ukraine, it will lead to a new escalation of the conflict, resulting in more casualties among the civilian population of Ukraine and Belarusian soldiers.

• *The simplest way to prevent the Belarusian army's involvement is...?* – to support our conscientious objectors in their struggle for non-violence and their right not to fight or take up arms.

If we genuinely desire peace and aim to achieve it without sacrifices, bloodshed, and violence, granting men the opportunity not to engage in warfare is the wisest decision we can make.

• *You are fighting for what is a basic human right - the right not to kill?* Yes, and to live according to our conscience, in peace and harmony. However, in Belarus, in 2022 alone, ca. 400 cases were filed against courageous men who refused to join the military and take up arms. Their refusal leads to prison.

• *Conscientious objectors in Belarus cannot find employment?* When applying for a job, they must present a military ticket they naturally don't possess. Desertion in Belarus is called "state treason" and punishable by death. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense announces tenders for body bags and metal identification tags. Belarusian conscientious objectors flee to Russia, arrested, and sent back - to prison.

• *Someone who refuses taking up arms and fighting becomes a criminal to be chased?* In Lithuania, they are deemed a threat to national security if they have any prior military service or education in military institutions. Any attempt by a former military person to pursue the path of peace and nonviolence encounters resistance not only from Lukashenko and his regime (that could be understandable), but also from the European Union.

### "Speakers Corner for Ministers of Peace's"

*Norway was the first country in the world to establish a Ministry of Environmental Protection. Now is the time for a Ministry of Peace - like they have in Nepal or Ethiopia. Today's media image is so militarized, that a counterbalance is needed.*

*The peace movement at the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom - WILPF-Norway has simply started, publishing what we believe a Minister of Peace would say - if we had one. There are many of us writing under the same vignette - with a focus on the Minister of Peace as an institution.*

#### The Human Right NOT to kill

The right to military refusal (conscientious objection) is a human right - clearly stated both in the UN system and in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Council of Europe's Court of Human Rights has also confirmed this.

Within EU, no official status is provided. From Lithuania, Belarusian conscientious objectors are sent back into the hands of the militaristic regime. Does EU truly desire peace as it claims?

Olga Karach and her work: IPB, the International Peace Bureau issued a press release announcing the nomination of the Belarusian human rights organization Our House and its director, Olga Karach, for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2024. The nomination is in recognition of their anti-war activities and comprehensive support provided to Belarusian conscientious objectors and deserters, both in Belarus and in European Union countries. The process of preparing all the necessary documents for the nomination is currently underway.

It should be reminded that since March 1, 2022 Our House has initiated a campaign "No mean No" (<https://news.house/campaign-updates/no-means-no>) to block the Belarusian army from participating in the war in Ukraine. Ever since, human rights activists have been actively supporting Belarusian men who refuse to join the military and do not want to fight in Ukraine. Currently, also this involves providing support to Belarusian conscientious objectors, who Lithuania perceives as a potential threat to its national security due to their prior military experience.