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movimento internazionale della riconciliazione

Sezione italiana dell'I.F.O.R. International Fellowship Of Reconciliation

15 May: International Day of Conscientious Objection

Once again this year we mark the International Day of Conscientious Objection to military service, created by the nonviolent and war resistance movements to reaffirm a fundamental human right, too often conculcated, restricted or threatened.

Like all anniversaries, the risk is that we will simply renew the memory of the non-violent resistance of so many who refused to be part of military structures, for religious, ethical and political reasons, perhaps taking it for granted that conscientious objection is substantially recognised almost everywhere and not looking to the future. The reality, however, is much more problematic and in many states objectors to military service are still harshly prosecuted under the law, repressing with harsh and various penalties the legitimate refusal of so many young people who oppose war and the military system.

On the occasion of the International Day of Conscientious Objectors 2023, peace organisations from all over Europe present today in Berlin and Brussels a petition to the European Commission to ensure that deserters and conscientious objectors from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine receive protection and asylum.

[The #ObjectWarCampaign](#) has in fact collected almost 50,000 signatures and the M.I.R. Italy has also contributed to this campaign. [Tomorrow, 16 May, two initiatives are scheduled in Rome](#): a flash mob in front of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian Embassies and a press conference, organised by the Italian partners of the International Campaign.

The government's militarist propaganda - which is increasingly infecting culture and schools, even though the majority of Italians are against this umpteenth 'useless slaughter' - is also subtly reviving the hypothesis that military conscription (which has not been abolished in Italy since 2005, but only 'suspended') may once again hover like a spectre over our young people. In fact, since 2017 they have been offered the opportunity to perform 'universal civilian service' but detached from any conscious choice of objection and rejection of war. There is therefore a lot of ground to make up, not only to create a culture of conscientious objection as an alternative to the military model of defence, but above all to develop a 'conscience of objection', both as an inalienable human right and as a concrete option to contribute to a more general nonviolent and eco-pacifist alternative.

The International Day of Conscientious Objection remains an occasion to recall the fundamental struggles in the past of those who resisted military service, but also to take stock of the national and international situations regarding the protection of this right, also helping to connect many different experiences and, at this specific time, to show concrete solidarity and real support for the Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian objectors who courageously defy the repression of their governments.

As president of the M.I.R. Italy, however, I regret the fact that in 2023 the I.F.O.R., unlike in recent years, has not produced any initiative on the occasion of this important day, which concerns precisely one of the founding themes of this historic international fellowship, of which we are proud to be the Italian branch and which we will continue to actively collaborate with, in the name of peace, justice and solidarity.

Ermete Ferraro,
President, International Reconciliation Movement