

# **SOUTH KOREA: Korea considers accepting conscientious objection**

By Jung Min-ho

Korea Times (23.08.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2xqgjMC> – The government is reviewing the possibility of alternative ways for conscientious objectors to serve their country.

All able-bodied men here must spend around two years in the military.

In a report to the U.N., the Ministry of Justice said the issue is open to discussion and it will take a careful examination before deciding anything – a big step forward from the previous stance that “it is practically impossible.”

In the report submitted Tuesday, the ministry said, “The Supreme Court held public hearings, a bill for that issue has been proposed to the National Assembly and ministries are collecting opinions through surveys. Discussions have been taking place.”

Over the past six decades, nearly 20,000 “conscientious objectors” have gone to prison for refusing to serve in the armed forces since it became compulsory for all able-bodied men in South Korea, a country still technically at war with North Korea.

Most of the objectors are Jehovah’s Witnesses, and they usually end up behind bars for 18 months.

Organizations such as Amnesty International advised the government to find other ways for them to fulfill their duty, but little has changed so far.

In the report, the ministry also noted it will consider whether to abolish the law which bans sexual activity between male soldiers.

However, the ministry defended the law's fundamental purpose, saying "in a certain circumstances, the law is necessary to maintain order."

In May, an Army captain was given a six-month prison sentence suspended for one year for homosexual activity, which drew protests from members of left-wing civic groups.

In a message that stresses the Moon Jae-in government's will to protect workers' rights, the ministry revealed plans to turn all irregular workers in the public sector into regular ones.

It also admitted that the government is responsible for the death of Baek Nam-ki, a farmer who died last year following 10 months in a coma after being sprayed by a police water cannon during a protest. The ministry promised to take proper measures to prevent any similar incidents.

But over issues such as abolition of the death penalty and the National Security Law, the ministry did not change its position.

The United Nations' human rights body will review the report in November at a meeting in Geneva.

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