



The Broken Rifle

Newsletter of War Resisters' International

Solidarity with Conscientious Objectors in South Korea

15 May – International Day on Conscientious Objection



The South Korean conscientious objection movement is still very young. It only dates back to the year 2000, when human rights organisations for the first time organised to highlight the fate of Jehovah's Witnesses, who had gone to prison for their conscientious objection since 1939. Since then, more than 10,000 Jehovah's Witnesses had gone to prison for their objection to military service, and many conscripts and also political prisoners had been aware of this, but it did not enter public consciousness. This changed in 2000, and in December 2001 a new movement for conscientious objection was born when Oh Tae-yang, a pacifist and Buddhist, declared his conscientious objection.

Nine years and more than 5,000 objectors later (the vast majority still Jehovah's Witnesses), there is still no right to conscientious objection in South Korea, in spite of some astonishing achievements. In fact, the change of government in December 2007 led to a backlash against the CO movement, and the new government has stepped back from some promises made by the previous government – especially the promise to introduce a right to conscientious objection. For this reason, War Resisters' International decided to focus on the situation in South Korea for the International Day on Conscientious Objection – 15 May 2009.

From human rights to antimilitarism and nonviolence

When the Korean CO movement started,

it was dominated by human rights organisations, and the discourse focused on the human rights of conscientious objection, based on religious freedom. While some peace organisations were part of the movement from the beginning, a discourse of peace and antimilitarism was not very visible within the movement in its early days. This is understandable. In the early times, the movement was a reaction to the routine imprisonment of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the silence about this. This was about to change – first slowly, with the declaration of conscientious objection of Oh Taeywang, and then faster, with the Iraq war, the despatch of Korean troops to Iraq, and the CO declaration of Cheol-min Kang in November 2003, a conscript who refused to continue his military service based on his opposition to the war in Iraq.

The movement also embraced nonviolence as a tool of struggle. It learned about nonviolence from a variety of sources, organised workshops, an annual peace camp, and took part in other campaigns, promoting nonviolence.

Achievements

Despite the fact that the right to conscientious objection has still not been recognised in South Korea, the movement had quite a few legal and political achievements:

Editorial

Welcome to this edition of *The Broken Rifle*, focusing on the situation of conscientious objectors in South Korea. This is not the first time War Resisters' International produced an issue on South Korea – the last time we did so was for Prisoners for Peace Day 2003. At that time, about 750 conscientious objectors were serving prison sentences for their conscientious objection. While this number has gone down now – according to the website of KSCO about 400 conscientious objectors are presently in prison – the legal situation of conscientious objectors has not improved considerably since November 2003. For this reason, War Resisters' International and Korea Solidarity for Conscientious Objection decided to have a focus on South Korea for the International Day on Conscientious Objection on 15 May 2009.

This issue of *The Broken Rifle* can only serve as an introduction to the situation of conscientious objectors in South Korea. At the same time, War Resisters' International and Korea Solidarity for Conscientious Objection are publishing a documentation (available at <http://wri-irg.org/node/7168>), which provides much more in depth information.

The material in this issue of *The Broken Rifle* and in the documentation shows how much the Korean CO movement has achieved in only eight years. But it also shows how important international pressure is in order to bring about change in South Korea. The CO movement has done a lot to mobilise the international human rights system, with a landmark decision of the United Nations Human Rights Committee on South Korea. We, as the international conscientious objection movement, now need to play our part. International grassroots support for the Korean CO movement is now urgently needed. 15 May 2009 is the opportunity to do so.

Andreas Speck

continued on page 2



Conscription in South Korea

The Republic of Korea maintains a strict conscription regime. Registration for conscription is automatic for men in the year they turn 18, followed by medical examination when they are 19. The duty to enlist in the Armed Forces lasts until the age of 31, but in case of draft evaders until 36.

Military service lasts two years. However, large parts of conscripts (almost 200 000 out of 300 000-350 000 conscripts annually) perform most of their service in public administrations or elsewhere, and only perform four weeks of basic military training. For those, military service lasts 26 months. Which kind of service has to be performed depends on the medical examination, and the needs of the military.

After discharge from service, conscripts are obliged to serve approximately 160 hours of military training over a period of eight years.

Of a total of 680 000 soldiers in the Korean military, about 75% are conscripts. Commissioned and non-commissioned officers are professional soldiers and account for the remaining 25%. According to the "Defence Reform Plan 2020", South Korea aims to increase the number of professional soldiers to 40% by 2020.

Conscientious objection is not recognised, and annually about 600 conscientious objectors receive prison sentences of 18 months. The great majority of conscientious objectors are Jehovah's Witnesses, but since 2001 the number of non-religious conscientious objectors has increased.

Since 1939, more than 15 000 conscientious objectors served prison sentences for their refusal to perform military service.

<http://wri-irg.org/node/4173>

continued from page 1

- a reduction of the usual punishment from three years to 18 months. According to the present legal situation, this is the minimum punishment which will lead to a discharge from the military, and therefore avoid a new call-up;
- conscientious objectors are no longer tried by military courts, but by civilian courts;
- a ground breaking decision of the United Nations Human Rights Committee on the right to conscientious objection to military service, clearly stating that not to provide for conscientious objection is a violation of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
- a recommendation of the South Korean National Human Rights Commission to recognise the right to conscientious objection;
- even an announcement of the South Korean Ministry of Defence that they would introduce a right to conscientious objection, although after a change of government they renounced this earlier statement.
- And according to several opinion polls a majority of South Koreans today supports the idea of a right to conscientious objection.

For a movement that is only eight years young this list of achievements is very impressive.

Obstacles

While the movement was pretty close to achieving its first aim, the introduction of the right to conscientious objection, the change of government following the presidential elections of December 2007 changed this. On 24 December 2008, the Ministry of Defence announced that the right to conscientious objection could not be granted, as it was not supported by the Korean people (the question is, why the survey conducted

on behalf of the Ministry of Defence came to such a different result – who pays determines the outcome?).

A government turn to the right has strengthened the forces of militarism and anti-communism again, which are strictly opposed to granting any rights to conscientious objectors – in spite of international obligations under human rights treaties, which require South Korea to recognise conscientious objection.

More pressure needed

The Korean CO movement has in the meantime filed about 500 more complaints with the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations. It can be expected that all 500 will be decided in the same way as the initial two in 2006 – that South Korea is violating human rights by not granting the right to conscientious objection.

War Resisters' International highlights the situation in South Korea on 15 May 2009, to increase the pressure from the international movement of conscientious objectors. Conscientious objectors from all over the world will gather in Seoul in May to show their support with the South Korean objectors. You can show your solidarity. Organise an event in front of a Korean embassy or consulate! Write to the South Korean president, demanding the right to conscientious objection.

Andreas Speck
War Resisters' International

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War Resisters' International has been a co-organiser of the blockade of NATO-ZU/Shut down NATO in Strasbourg on 4 April. More than 1 000 people participated in nonviolent blockades as part of Block NATO. More information: <http://wri-irg.org/node/6990>



South Korea pays the price for big US bases

1. Overview

US Forces have been stationed in the Republic of Korea (ROK) since 1950. Historically, their main role was to deter any possible war threat posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). However, the USA's Global Posture Review changes the role of US Forces in Korea (USFK) from a stationary army on the Korean peninsula into a regional hub for rapid deployment and capable of pre-emptive strikes.

The Land Partnership Plan of 2002, agreed by ROK and the USA, has re-organised forces into fewer but bigger bases and training areas. Bases previously clustered on the Demarcation Line have been closed, but the expansion of bases further south increases the capacity to send highly trained troops to other Asian 'theatres'. Finally, ground combat duties have been transferred to the ROK army, thereby reducing the likely numbers of US casualties. In 2003 the US Second Infantry Division was moved south from Yongsan to Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek while under the 2004 Relocation of US Bases Agreement, the ROK government undertook to forcibly evict farmers (which it did in 2005-06).

2. Current Situation of Base Relocation

The 2004 Relocation agreement is five years behind schedule because of local objections and cost overruns. Local authorities object to the US decision to raise the land level around the camp - requiring flattening hills and bringing in more than 1 million truckloads of landfill. Meanwhile, expenditure already exceeds the initial US\$10 million estimate - therefore the US wants the ROK to raise its 55% contribution.

3. Enlargement of the Training Areas and Ranges and Intensified Usages – Damages Spread

1) Training Areas

US bases in the northern part of Gyeonggi-do are being vacated but the USFK-only training area and ranges are being expanded - at Rodriguez Complex Range, Dagma North Training Area and Story Range troops train for Iraqi and Afghanistan. Various safety issues have emerged from the constant military training and exercises, and nearby villagers complain of increased noise levels and ground vibration.

Villagers near the now-closed Firing Range in Maehyang-ri demand compensation for the damage suffered. An August 2008 mental health report found a much higher suicide rate than the national average and also higher incidence of psychological disorders. Although neither government has paid any attention to the mental health of

civilians residing near training grounds, such consequences are likely to continue long after the firing range or training grounds have been closed.

The joint use of training grounds has required the expansion of the ROK training areas for USFK use - Mugun-ri Training Area (the Twin Bridges Training Area) doubling in size. Since October 1997, this training area has been used by the USFK 13 weeks out of the year (91 days).

2) Building the West Coast Belt – Strengthening Air Bases

In relocating bases from the DMZ to Pyeongtaek: the USFK are preparing for rapid offensives and strengthening defensive forces against the DPRK, while at the same time targeting China. Pyeongtaek, at the western tip of the Korean peninsula, is close to China. Being near the Osan Air Base and the ROK Navy base and ports, and already connected to the railway and highways, it is ideally located for a military hub, and now has Patriot Missile Units and PAC-3 (Patriot Advanced Capability).

On the west coast, US air bases connect to form a strategic line going south from Seoul - Suwon, Pyeongtaek, Kunsan, and Cheongju with the Chik-do Firing Range at sea facing the Kunsan Air Base.

Noise pollution has increased drastically as the USAF brings squadrons to Kunsan from elsewhere for intensive exercises: in 2007 from Holloman, New Mexico, and Aviano, Italy; in 2008 from Shaw, South Carolina. The June 2008 'Max Thunder' joint USAF-ROK exercise in June 2008 involved forces based at Kunsan, Okinawa, Guam and Idaho.

It is hard to prove scientifically a causal connection between aircraft noise in the Kunsan area and various human health problems or the sudden death of livestock. However, the evidence is accumulating.

3. The Burden on the ROK of the expenses for Base Relocation

The Status of US Forces Agreement (SOFA) grants land for bases and training areas at no cost. Various taxes and highway tolls are also waived; public utilities charge concessionary rates, while some public facilities are gratis. Since 1991, the US has received assistance from the ROK for the cost of building military facilities outlined by the Special Measures Agreement (SMA). The SMA is renewed

every 2-3 years and each time ROK's share of the burden increases. Unused money under the SMA should be repaid to the ROK. Instead, since 2002, the USFK keeps this surplus in a special fund which has now accumulated US\$10,000 million. Under the SMA, the ROK paid US\$725.5 million in 2007 and US\$741.4 million in 2008 to the USFK, yet the USA continues to demand more.

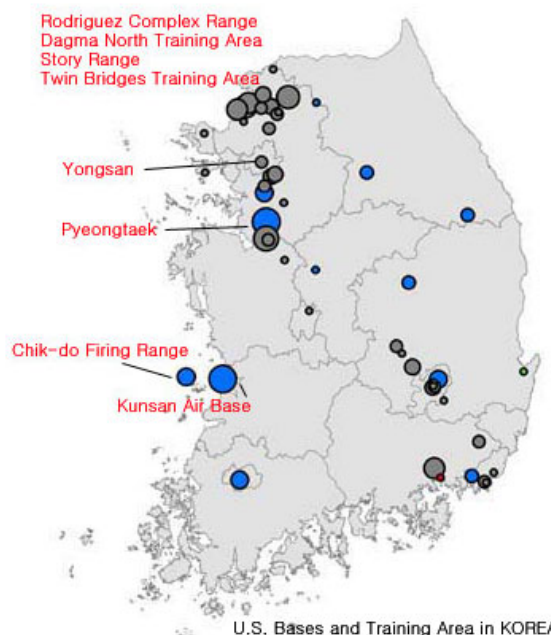
In essence, the ROK is meeting nearly all the costs incurred in US base relocation through the combined payments under the SMA and the agreed 55% allotment under the Base Relocation Agreement.

4. Neglecting Environmental Damages of the Returned Bases

In 2007, 23 bases were returned to the ROK under the relocation agreement - but without undergoing thorough decontamination. The US ignores ROK regulations, applying its standards of Known, Imminent and Substantial Endangerment to human health. In some places contamination levels are 100 times above the limit set by Korean law.

The SOFA between the US and the ROK has been an unequal agreement with grave costs to the ROK; however, due to the consistent efforts and campaigns of civic organisations in the ROK, certain aspects of the SOFA have been altered. The amended SOFA now contains a clause regarding environmental damage caused by military usage, requiring the USFK to clean up contamination before handing over bases that are being shut down.

October 2008
National Campaign for Eradication of
Crimes by US Troops in Korea



U.S. Bases and Training Area in KOREA



South Korean COs at the UN: a string of successes

South Korea's conscientious objectors have been very successful in using the United Nations human rights system, but so far did not achieve the right to conscientious objection in their own country.

Instrumental have been especially Minbyun Lawyers for a Democratic Society, who have submitted several reports to the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights (one of which co-authored with War Resisters' International, see <http://wri-irg.org/news/2004/korea04-en.htm>) and the Human Rights Committee.

In 2006, their work brought results. In its "concluding observations", the Human Rights Committee said that South Korea should *"take all necessary measures to recognize the right of conscientious objectors to be exempted from military service"*.

Not much later, they achieved another success: in a groundbreaking decision on two individual complaints of South Korean conscientious objectors, the Human Rights Committee said that not to provide for the right to conscientious objection amounts to a violation of Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). This decision is important not only for South Korea, but for conscientious objectors in any country that signed the ICCPR – in presently plays an important role in a demand of unconstitutionality of the Colombian recruitment law in front of the Constitutional Court of Colombia.

Presently, about 500 more CO cases from South Korea are pending in front of the Human Rights Committee. A decision on these cases will increase the pressure on the Korean government to finally recognise the right to conscientious objection.

Conscientious objection helped me to encounter myself

I participated in student movements during my college years. That experience influenced me even after I graduated, and I felt very uncomfortable with the idea of becoming a soldier loyal to his country. I not only found it difficult to follow orders from any superior without questioning, but was most afraid of the forceful and violent nature of the military culture that builds up the sense of hierarchy.

In early 2002, I came to learn about conscientious objection. It was only then that the term 'conscientious objection' became well known to the public, even though there had been numerous conscientious objectors for the past sixty years in South Korea. That there can be a different choice and that many young men had been making this decision for a long time made me feel ashamed, because I was just trying to sidestep the problem. I thought that I just had to endure military service despite my opposition to it. As I heard more and more about stories of resisting the military and wars, however, I seriously began to think about making such a decision. I finally decided to get rid of militarism in my life.

In the winter of 2002, I heard the Bush administration announce war against Iraq, saw 9/11 victim families oppose the war. Along with friends and colleagues, I co-organised anti-war activities and also went to Iraq to stay with people for quite some time. In Iraq, I could hear what was on the mind of the people who were living day by day suffering from the war. Meanwhile, the South Korean government and parliament passed the Korean troop deployment plans for the Iraq war.

On 13 November 2003, the day I was supposed to enlist in the army, I did not answer the order from the Korean military and instead had a dinner with my activist friends. A few days later, the police called saying that they wanted to investigate me since I did not enlist on my enlistment date. After several interrogations, I went on trial. The judge decided to detain me without asking me a single question, and I was imprisoned on the



same day. About one and a half months later, the court allowed me out on bail, but one year later I faced a trial and got imprisoned again. During the next seven months, I faced the second and third trials while in jail, and the court found me guilty and sentenced me to 1 year and 6 months in jail.

Unlike in the past, there is no longer torture or physical violence in South Korean prisons. Instead of putting bodies to death, the modern prison restricts time and space, which are two of the foundations of a human's life. The human within the prison becomes desperately obsessed with time and space as if trying to refuse death. In a way, prison was a quasi-death experience for me. A sense of frustration with your life. A lack of sympathy for others. A soul which shrinks just like the tiny cell that I was in. The prison not only restrains your physical body but also darkens your inner body. It always seemed to give me an order that I must endure all these things.

In prison you get forced to do things you don't want. But now that I think about it, conscientious objection helps you talk to yourself, meet your inner side, and encounter clashes with yourself. You get to realise that peace starts when you start looking at the otherness within yourself. Only then the sympathy with others can continuously be maintained.

Changgeun Yeom



Conscientious Objection in South Korea

A documentation by War Resisters' International and Korea Solidarity for Conscientious Objection

Just in time for International Conscientious Objection Day – 15 May – WRI and KSCO published a documentation on the situation of conscientious objectors in South Korea. This publication, available online for download, includes background information on the right to conscientious objection in South Korea, and the Korean conscientious objection movement. It includes testimonies of conscientious objectors, and a range of legal documents, from Korean to international jurisprudence.

This publication is the most up-to-date overview on conscientious objection in South Korea, and an invaluable resource for everyone who wants to support the Korean CO movement.

The documentation can be read and downloaded at <http://wri-irg.org/node/7168>.

Memories of imprisonment, to which I would not like to come back

On 1 December 1 2005, I called a press conference to declare my conscientious objection to military service, with two other conscientious objectors. Since I became active in a university student movement, I had been thinking of becoming a conscientious objector, not as a pacifist but as a radical statement of resistance to the State. Interestingly enough, only after my decision to become a conscientious objector did I begin to try to live as a pacifist.

Unlike other conscientious objectors, who are usually arrested around three or four months after their enlistment date, I was not arrested until August 2006, later than I had expected. In those days, it was becoming common for conscientious objectors to be tried without first being detained, and this could have happened in my case except unfortunately the prosecutor challenged the court's decision to let me stay free until I was sentenced, so causing repeated trials in which he demanded my confinement. Nevertheless I was still able to participate in many actions against the expansion of US bases.

As usual with conscientious objectors, I was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment, which I spent in four jails in the end.

Aside from other difficulties in prison, a major problem for all prisoners - not only conscientious objectors - is over-crowding. Usually, one person is allocated around 1.65 square meters of space. While I was detained in Cheongju, following an incident in which two cellmates died after fighting each other, the

Ministry of Justice issued an order to all detention centres never to have two people in a cell, but either one or three. As a result, I had to share a cell of 3.3 square metres with two others prisoners, meaning that nobody could lie down straight.

Without question, were I to face call-up again, I would again object to military service. However, at the same time, I don't ever want to be put to prison again. Despite the fact that one might be able to have some meaningful experience in prison, as happens in other communities, there is far more to lose through imprisonment than to gain. For me, it was a process of pain rather than a useful experience in any sense to get to know the limits of my tolerance for others. Without glorifying my experience in prison or exaggerating the adversity, I am sure that I don't want to return to prison for whatever reason, including as a result of my nonviolent direct action or civil disobedience. This is not an excuse for not committing myself, but - although prison may be unavoidable - I genuinely do not want to spend any more of my life there.

Yongsuk Lee



The armed Forces are War-Making Machines

Declaration of conscientious objection

To be liberated or to be incarcerated? It is an unavoidably acute question. The world we live in, at the global level, is constantly at war. Not surprisingly, as of the beginning of January 2009, we can see the war currently continuing in Gaza. The 20th century is remembered as an age of wars and presumably so will be the 21st. The US government started the 'war on terror' against Iraq after the 11 September attacks. The Iraq war was nothing but another dreadful war. Not only were the nation state of Iraq and the terrorists deemed to be enemies of the US, but the US clearly declared this was a war against evil. Clarifying who is evil requires great care.

The South Korean government have been taking part in the war in Iraq. In 2003, it decided to send troops there despite the lack of proof that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Despite the daily demonstration against this decision, and the kidnapping and beheading by Iraqi militants of a South Korean, Kim Sun-il, the government didn't cancel the deployment plan.

Democracy is constituent power

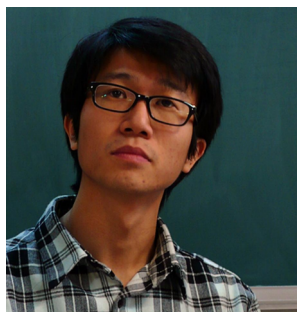
Democracy in Korea was again set back in July and August 2004. The Korean Supreme Court, on 15 July 2004, found conscientious objectors guilty, while the South Korean

Constitutional Court, on 26 August 2004, rejected a constitutional challenge to article 88 of the Military Service Act. I am against these nationalistic decisions which state that the 'duty of national defence' is more important than 'individual's freedom of conscience'. As long as such decisions continue to be made, the right to freedom will remain infringed by nationalistic reasoning. Underlying a written constitution is the practice of the people.

This is the reason for my objection to military service. I feel guilt towards my parents. This pain may be the same as what other conscientious objectors, their family, lovers, friends and their supporters have gone through up until now. I would really like to apologise to my parents for my decision to object military service while I also would like to console other conscientious objectors. I hope the step we take today will lead to another pleasurable step on our way to democracy.

Jungmin Oh

On Tuesday, 6 January 2009
uGonG



Nonviolent Livelihood Struggle and Global Militarism: links & strategies

International Conference, Ahmedabad, India, January 2010

War Resisters' International is cooperating with Indian partner organisations for an international conference investigating the links between local nonviolent livelihood struggles and global militarism, including war profiteering. This participatory conference will bring together campaigners from all over the world to analyse the role of states and multinational corporations in depriving local communities of their sources of livelihood, and learning from the experience of nonviolent resistance at various levels - from the community to the global - and at various phases, from preventing displacement to planning for return.

On a broad level, the conference aims to raise awareness both of the range of threats that global militarism poses to local communities and of the possibilities for nonviolent resistance.

On the international level, the conference aims to be a meeting place for those defending communities against globalised forces and those working against various elements of global militarism.

The conference will take place at Gujarat Vidyapith (University), which was founded by Mohandas Gandhi in 1920. It is co-organised by War Resisters' International, Gujarat Sarvodaya Mandal, and Sampoor-na Kranti Vidyalyaya ('Institute for Total Revolution').

The International Conference will last from 22-25 January 2009, followed by a WRI Business and Council Meeting on 27-29 January.

For more information, contact the WRI office at info@wri-irg.org. More information will soon be available on the WRI website.



"The CO movement has changed me"

Presentation of Jungmin Choi in Donostia, 1 November 2008

I have an American friend who used to stay in Korea a few years ago. And I remember once he said to me that his family in the USA would often tell him to come back before a war would happen between North and South Korea. After hearing what his family said to him, I realised that people outside Korea thought about a war or a military tension even more than the people living in Korea did. (...)

Yes, we had the Korean War in 1950s, now 58 years ago. I will not explain how catastrophic it was – it was a total disaster as you could imagine about any war. It has divided the Korean peninsula into North and South and there have not been many meaningful approaches to communicate and understand each other since. Rather, there have been severe conflicts and feelings of hatred between the two Koreas, with a lot of propaganda by conservative politicians. It still works in Korea for conservative authorities to arise a fear of war in people's mind, especially when they want to avoid or hide their own political problems. An ideology that we call 'red complex' has been working in Korea to deter any movement from protesting against the government.

I used to write a letter to soldiers in my primary school days, because writing a letter was part of the official curriculum. Can you imagine young children made to write letters to show hospitality to someone who they had never met before?

That's just one episode of what happened in Korea. In that way, many Koreans came to have biased images about North Korea. Here's another funny story. In the comics I was forced to read as a child, North Koreans were described as pigs, not in human appearance. And I remember when I met North Koreans for the first time, I got really embarrassed because they looked just like me, not like pigs! (...)

The CO movement has some special meaning for me, because it's been trying to not only make people think about what peace is but also remind people of their lost human sympathy. The CO movement has arisen the people's memory of shooting human shaped figures in their army, and it's also been questioning an atmosphere where performing military service is considered natural. In this sense, the movement for the rights of conscientious objection questioned what militarism is and how we ourselves had been tacitly helping militarism keep going.

Questioning military and militarism was really sensational to Korean society, because it had been too natural for men to do compulsory military service. (...)

The movement for the recognition of conscientious objectors' human rights in Korea started in the end of 2000. It was strange to realise that there had never

been any discussions about conscientious objection, considering the fact that most people who went to the army had seen Jehovah's Witnesses objecting to taking up arms. At that time, I asked some of my progressive friends if they had seen any people who refused to take up arms while they were performing their military service. The answer was that they did see that kind of people in the army but that they thought of these a very weird persons. I then thought that this is partly due to their bias about this specific religion.

There was a very huge student movement when I was a university student. Quite a few students burned themselves to death as a protest and many other students went out to the street with petrol bombs, shouting slogans for the overthrow of the dictatorial government.

Those days, most student activists regarded an army as one of the most important organisations during the period of revolution and they also tried to make soldiers aware of social issues while they were performing their military service. This kind of very militarised students movement has been disappearing but in some ways it still exists. You realise the existence of militarism from some people's ideas such as considering conscientious objection as a weak or coward way of resistance, or the idea that we need a strong army for the country after the reunification of two Koreas.

With raised social awareness about conscientious objection, some people began considering objecting to their military service. Most of them belonged to student movement groups. In December 2001, Taeyang Oh, a peace activist and a Buddhist, declared his objection to military service and this also inspired other young men who were also thinking about peace and conscientious objection.

With more people deciding to be conscientious objectors, we thought we needed to be more systematic to cope with the people who had some problems when they decided whether or not to object military service. So we decided to produce a guide to help and advise them more efficiently, distributed the book and uploading it on the internet so that people could get information more easily. (...) After seeing the guide, many contacted us to get some more advice. We would tell them to think again about their decision. Normally, we could expect there would be some serious problems between them and their parents who would think it shameful to object to military service. And parents would be worried about their sons' difficulty in finding jobs after their release. In addition, going through 18 months in prison would never be easy,



Jungmin Choi Photo: Julian Dinkgreffe

especially with the poor conditions in Korean prisons. Despite the fact that we approached them very carefully, some people gave up and changed their decision to do military service while getting through their trial and detention. These stories were left a bitter taste for them as well as for us.

In the summer of 2004, right after the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court announced that the existing military service law was not unconstitutional, many delayed trials were resumed and many conscientious objectors were sent to prison. I remember the autumn of 2004 as a very depressing period when all of my close friends were sent to prison.

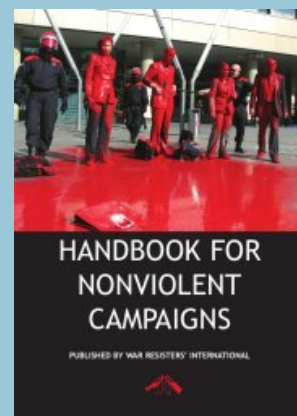
Since the winter of 2004, supporting conscientious objectors has been a very important part of our activity. We were trying to have a close relationship to help each group which supported a conscientious objector, and we would make and send publications to those who were in prison to keep them informed about other conscientious objectors or about our movement.

Some problems arose, as supporting conscientious objectors was getting more important among our movement. It was about the way we shared the work depending on gender. It was usually women who took the main responsibility for looking after objectors. It was to some extent true that there were more women left than men after the arrests, but it is also true that it was regarded natural of women to take care of objectors – of men. This problem still remains and we have not found any satisfying solution. At the moment, that problem does not seem to be as important as before, as there are less objectors in prison than before. Before the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, our movement focused on introduction of substitute service. But sometimes this approach limited our own movement. For one thing, conscientious objectors were regarded as poor victims of a state authority in spite of the fact that they were not forced to object to military service but chose to be a minority of their own will. On the other hand, objectors were believed to be a heroes who had opposed

directly to a state power. The thing is that both ways of thinking were closely connected with the idea of militarism, which we had been struggling to change. And in this sense, women were easily positioned in a trivial and marginal place. As for me, I remember those days when our movement was just about to receive public attention and I was not given many chances to present my opinions, for example in newspapers or in public debates, just because I am a woman. I was not welcomed as they did not like a woman to talk about the army even though my views were reasonable. That exactly showed and proved what militarism was about in Korea. In the last presidential election, which was in the last winter (2007), a conservative person pursuing neo-liberalism became president of Korea. This new government has withdrawn the policy of introducing a substitute service, which was proposed by the last government. Now many policies suggested by the government remind Koreans of a military dictatorship. People who voted for him last year, obsessed with money and political distrust, have now realised that the election pledges made by the president were not for the people, and they came out to streets to protest. I've never seen such a big crowd on the streets before. I don't know how people abroad thought of the candlelight rallies that happened in Korea. But, I am sure that in many ways the candlelight rallies have functioned as a school for experiencing democracy. In the candlelight rallies where different groups and arguments coexisted. We were trying to spread the idea of nonviolent direct action and to support any riot policeman if he declared his conscientious objection.

The existence of conscripted policeman shows what nonsense the Korean military system is. (...) At rallies, we were trying to appeal to people to think about how to protect themselves and how to communicate with the policemen, rather than reacting in a violent way to violence from the police. And we distributed our leaflets at the rallies to both riot policemen and people, which said policemen have the right to refuse unjustifiable orders. In the end of July 2008, Lee Gil-jun, who was a conscripted policeman, contacted us during his holiday and told us he did not want to return to his duty. His objection has given rise to hot debates throughout Korean society, because he said he felt guilty when he was ordered to break up candlelight demonstrations. And his declaration has also changed the attitude of many people who opposed the right to conscientious objection and are now in favour of this right.

I think I have changed a lot since I started to be engaged in this movement 8 years ago. I remember when I found it strange to hear the word 'nonviolence' coming out of my mouth, because I had experienced the past student movement where a violent encounter with the state was thought to be inevitable. After eight years of working, I now strongly believe in the power of nonviolence, which can not only change certain social systems but also can transform me to be more peaceful. So, now I believe that anybody can change or will change to be more peaceful, just like the way I have changed. I would like to say that this change has inspired me a lot and makes me reflect about myself and our movement. I hope you can get some inspiration from my experience.



Handbook for Nonviolent campaigns

Social change doesn't just happen. It's the result of the work of committed people striving for a world of justice and peace. This work takes place in groups or cells of activists, in discussions, in training sessions, in reflecting on previous experiences, in planning, in experimenting and in learning from others. Preparing ourselves for our work for social justice is key to its success.

It includes sections on:

- ▶ developing strategic nonviolent campaigns
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There is no definitive recipe for successful non-violent actions and campaigns. This handbook, however, is a series of resources that can inspire and support your own work, especially if you adapt the resources to your own needs and context.

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