



This report is submitted by Mesarvot, a grassroots network providing legal, social, and psychological support to Israeli conscientious objectors. Since its inception, Mesarvot has been at the forefront of protecting those who refuse to participate in military service due to ideological, religious, or political convictions, advocating for their rights within a system increasingly geared toward repression.

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Submission to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Subject: Systematic Repression and Arbitrary Punishment of Conscientious Objectors in Israel

I. Introduction and Legal Framework

This submission outlines the deteriorating human rights situation for conscientious objectors (COs) in Israel, particularly in light of the ongoing genocide and humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the West Bank. The practices detailed herein represent a *prima facie* violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Israel is a party. Specifically, the punitive detention of COs violates Article 18 (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion) and Article 7, which strictly prohibits torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

Recent Developments:

Escalation of Repression:

Since late 2023, the military establishment has intensified its deterrence policy against objectors. This occurs against a backdrop of increasing internal dissent,

including the emergence of refuser organizations such as the "Soldiers for the Hostages" movement or a sharp increase in the number of refusers supported by our network. In response, the Israeli government has sought to cripple support networks like Mesarvot through legislative threats, such as proposed tax penalties of up to 80% on donations to NGOs deemed to "interfere in internal affairs."

The End of Ultra-Orthodox Exemptions:

Historically, members of the Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) community were granted a de facto exemption. However, following a landmark Supreme Court ruling in June 2024, the legal basis for this expired. The court ruled that the state must draft yeshiva students and freeze funding to institutions whose students do not comply. This shift has resulted in a new class of "involuntary objectors", religious individuals who now face imprisonment for refusing to serve on religious grounds.

II. Obstacles to Legal Objection:

There are three primary administrative channels for exemption, all of which are currently being manipulated to suppress dissent and obscure the true scale of conscientious objection.

1. The Conscience Committee (The "Pacifist" Exception)

While nominally the ideal path for a CO, this committee is designed to be nearly impossible to navigate. The IDF employs a rigid, binary definition of pacifism: an applicant must prove they oppose *all* forms of violence, in all contexts, throughout their entire lives.

- **Selective Objection Denied:** The committee categorically refuses to recognize "selective" objectors, those whose conscience forbids them from participating in specific acts, such as the ongoing genocide in Gaza or the maintenance of the occupation.

2. Health and Mental Health Exemptions

Due to the failure of the Conscience Committees, many objectors are forced into the "mental health" channel. While the army finds this route more palatable because it pathologizes dissent, the process requires expensive private psychiatric reports that can cost thousands of shekels, making this path inaccessible to low-income refusers.

3. "Unfit for Service" (Not Apt) Exemption

Traditionally granted after 100 days of cumulative imprisonment, we have documented a recent, intentional extension of this timeline. The military now forces objectors to remain in the "revolving door" of prison for significantly longer periods to break their resolve.

III. The Process of Refusal and Confinement Conditions

The trajectory for a conscientious objector is intentionally designed to be a grueling cycle of "re-arrest and re-sentencing," intended to exert maximum psychological pressure.

The "Revolving Door" Sentencing Model

When an individual arrives at the recruitment center and declares their refusal, they are not met with a legal hearing, but with a summary disciplinary proceeding.

- **Initial Detention:** Refusers often wait for hours in holding areas where they are subjected to "pressure talks" by high-ranking commanders. These sessions involve threats of years of imprisonment, permanent criminal records, and the total destruction of their future professional lives.
- **The Sham Trial:** The "trial" is a brief technical step where the objector has no right to a formal defense. They are typically sentenced to an initial term of 20 to 45 days in military prisons like Neve Tzedek.
- **Cyclical Re-arrest:** Upon completion of a sentence, the objector is ordered to report for duty again the following morning. When they refuse again, the entire process repeats. Traditionally, this cycle lasted four rounds (approx. 100–120 days). However, under the current "deterrence" policy, the IDF has begun issuing sentences totaling over 180 days, a severity not documented since the Second Intifada.

Confinement Conditions and Ill-Treatment

Conditions within these facilities have increasingly transitioned from standard military discipline to practices that border on, or constitute, torture:

- **Systemic Isolation:** Objectors are frequently placed in solitary confinement for weeks. Transgender women, such as Yona Rozentahl and Ella Kider, have been held in isolation for up to 50 days under the guise of "protection," a practice that results in severe sensory deprivation.
- **Physical Abuse and Restraint:** We have documented the use of punitive handcuffing, where detainees are bound in "painful and tight" restraints for up to 8 hours. During these periods, they are frequently denied water or the ability to use the restroom.
- **Hygiene and Degradation:** Hygiene is used as a tool of coercion. Some objectors have been barred from changing clothes for weeks or allowed to wash their laundry only once in a 45-day period.
- **Ideological Harassment:** While right-wing prisoners are often allowed to express political opinions freely, refusers face disciplinary punishment for expressing their beliefs and are frequently subjected to stalking and threats from other inmates, often with the tacit approval of prison staff.

IV. Documented Case Studies (2024–2025)

Itamar Greenberg was held between 2024 and 2025 for refusing to join the military due to his opposition to the ongoing genocide and apartheid. He was sentenced to six months in prison, a term of length not seen in the last 20 years for an objector, signifying a drastic shift toward harsher deterrence. Similarly, Yuval Peleg was recently released in January 2025 after enduring 130 days in prison across five separate terms, illustrating the "revolving door" policy used to maximize psychological pressure.

Elazar Kaufman and Aryeh Rabinowitz have become symbols of the military's failure to accommodate religious objection. A formal complaint filed on September 15, 2025, by the Committee Against Torture and Mesarot's legal advisor, details their

45-day isolation at Neve Tzedek. They were subjected to torture conditions, including punitive handcuffing that prevented them from drinking or using the restroom for 8-hour stretches. Kaufman's treatment led to a severe anxiety attack requiring emergency hospitalization, yet both continued to be denied access to independent civilian psychiatric care.

Furthermore, the cases of Yona Rozentahl and Ella Kider highlight the discriminatory treatment of gender minorities. As trans women, they were singled out and kept in total solitary confinement for 50 and 30 days, respectively. Beyond individual cases, a worrying administrative trend emerged in December 2025, when two anonymous refusers were denied even the preliminary meeting required to convene a Conscience Committee. This suggests a systemic effort to scrap the legal right to a conscientious hearing entirely.

V. Conclusion

The Israeli military's policy of lengthier prison terms and the denial of administrative due process constitutes state-sanctioned repression. We urge the OHCHR to investigate the use of solitary confinement and punitive restraints against ideological and religious objectors and to monitor legislative attempts to criminalize support networks like Mesarvot.