

Where in the world are today's Anabaptist Conscientious Objectors?



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MWC Shared Conviction #5

- ▶ The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice, and share our possessions with those in need.



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Types of Conscientious Objectors

- ▶ Selective
- ▶ Non-Combative
- ▶ Alternative service
- ▶ Absolute COs
- ▶ Military Taxation COs



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COs in Canada in WWI

- ▶ 1917 Military Service Act exempted Historic Peace Churches
- ▶ Almost exclusively religious COs
- ▶ Mennonites created the NRRO (Non-Resistant Relief Organization) in 1918 after criticism that Mennonites were doing nothing in regards to WWI, one of the predecessor organizations to MCC



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COs in Canada in WW II

- ▶ 1940 National Resources Mobilization Act required registration
- ▶ Requests by the Historic Peace Churches for exemption; not allowed
- ▶ 1941 Alternative Service program set up by the Canadian government – road building camps, firefighting camps, hospital service, agriculture, teaching
- ▶ 1943 COs given permission to do non-combatant service in medical/dental corps
- ▶ 11,000 recognized COs in Canada, of which 7,500 were Anabaptists
- ▶ 4,500 Anabaptists served in the military



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CO status around the world

- ▶ Many countries maintain a system of forced conscription, selective conscription, or mandatory service – eg Brazil, Israel, Austria
- ▶ Some countries have provisions for COs to do alternative service; many countries do not – eg South Korea, Colombia
- ▶ Most Global North countries have been removing mandatory military service, but in many countries it is still possible by law, like Canada.
- ▶ United Nations statement that there is a right of everyone to exercise conscientious objection to military service (1989)



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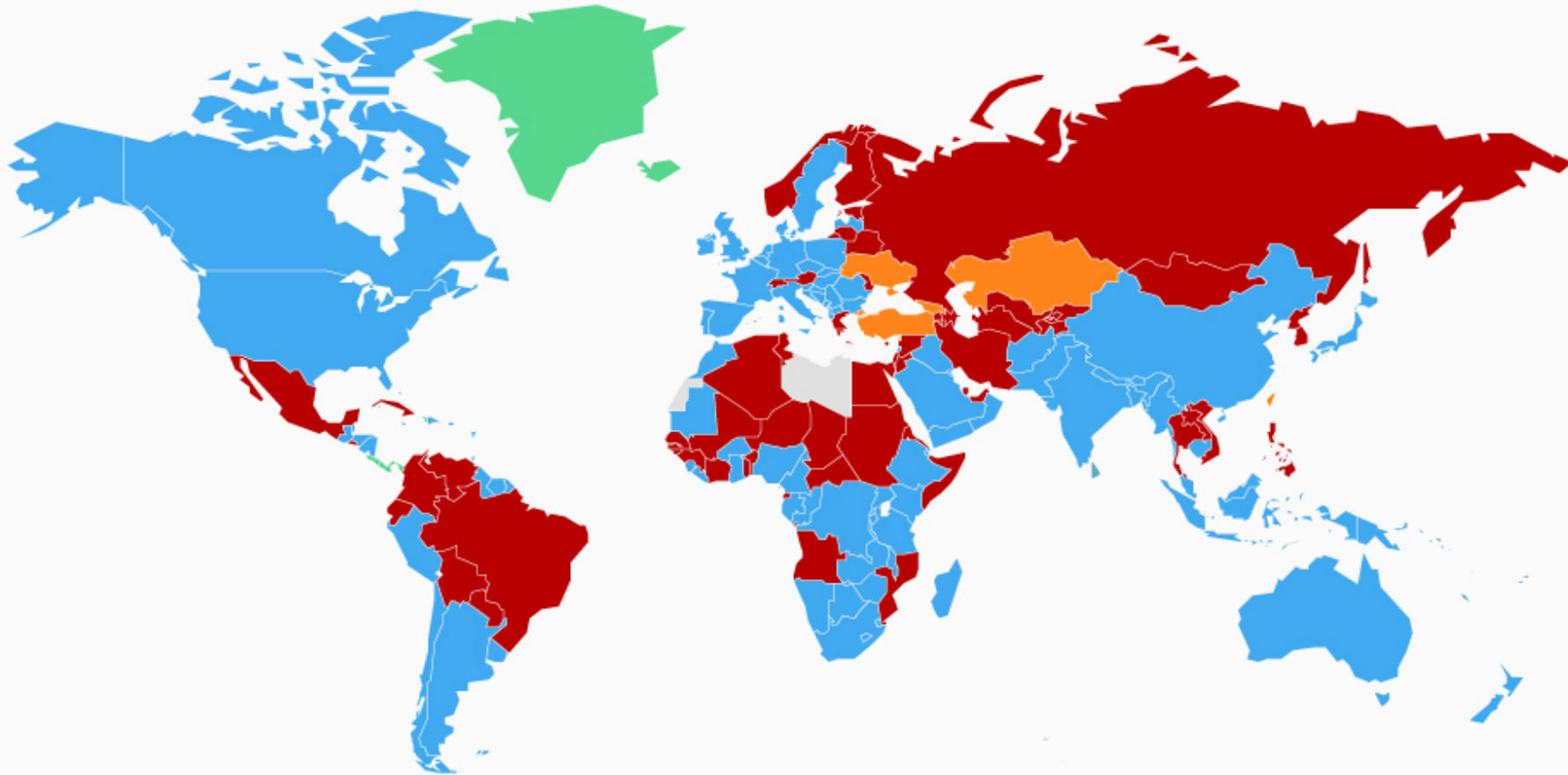
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The State Of Military Conscription Around The World

- No armed forces
- No enforced conscription
- Conscription
- Plan to abolish conscription in the near future



@StatistaCharts

Source: Respective militaries

statista

What about Anabaptists around the world in countries that require military service?

- ▶ Brazil – registration required, only 10-15% of eligible young men are called for military service, occasionally some alternative service tolerated in some regions, provision exists for COs but is bureaucratic and not easily accessible. Mennonites tend to register, and to serve if called for service.
- ▶ Cuba – registration required, military service required of some, but is relatively easy to avoid. Anabaptists don't think about this very much.
- ▶ Ethiopia – registration required, military service required of some, which would be enforced in time of war. Some thinking that military service is a national obligation that should not be dodged.



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What about Anabaptists around the world in countries that require military service?

- ▶ Zimbabwe – registration required. Military service no longer enforced, but could be. BIC churches opposed required military service in earlier decades, but no CO status available. Now the topic is not debated or discussed.
- ▶ Germany – Draft started in 1956. Alternative service available since 1961. In recent years about 2/3 of young men chose alternative service and about 1/3 chose military service. Germany came to depend on that alternative service as vital to society. The draft ended just in 2011 when funding was found to keep those services going without it being maintained by the draft.



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What about Anabaptists around the world in countries that require military service?

- ▶ Switzerland – until 1996 there was mandatory military service with no option for alternative service or CO status. Every year hundreds of young men chose jail over military service, including some Mennonites, but not all Mennonites. Since 1996 there is alternative service.
- ▶ Austria – mandatory military service, although CO status and alternative service became available in 1975.



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What about Anabaptists around the world in countries that require military service?

- ▶ Colombia – Military service required of all men at age 18. Except those with a high school diploma serve one year, while those without serve 18-24 months. You cannot own property, graduate from university, enter into a professional contract, or stand for office without a military card (although they can be “bought”).
- ▶ South Korea – military service required, for 21-24 months. No alternative service or COs are allowed – Korea has the largest number of COs in prison in the world – 92% of jailed COs in the world are in South Korea – every year 600 young men go to jail for religious convictions – most of them are Jehovah’s Witnesses



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Anabaptist COs in 2015 Colombia



- ▶ Reinaldo Aguirre
- ▶ “We oppose military or armed service because it is incompatible with the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ. We owe him absolute loyalty, not to a nation, nor a state, nor government, but to the Son of God who teaches us to love our enemies, to do good to those who mistreat us, and to pray for those who wish to do us harm.”
- ▶ 3 years of trying to declare CO status, without military card could not go to school or work
- ▶ January 2015 court approved his CO status, a precedent for the country



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Anabaptist COs in 2015 South Korea



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- ▶ Sangmin Lee
- ▶ Member of Grace and Peace Mennonite Church
- ▶ Released August 2015 after spending 15 months in prison (18 month sentence); now has a criminal record
- ▶ First Mennonite CO in Korea
- ▶ Family did not support him in his CO convictions
- ▶ Received letters of support worldwide

Canada CO status today

- ▶ No recognition of CO status in National Defence Act
- ▶ In case of conscription, there is a possibility that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (freedom of conscience and religion) might hold
- ▶ CO Registry in existence since early 1990s to informally declare one's objection to military participation
 - ▶ Download an MCC created CO Registration Kit from CommonWord website
- ▶ Check out the Peace Tax Fund by Conscience Canada



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What do you believe?

What are you doing to live out
your belief?



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