

Singapore's Input to the Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on conscientious objection to military service at HRC-50

Singapore does not recognise the universal applicability of the right to conscientious objection to military service. In our view, HRC resolution 20/2 goes beyond what is prescribed in international law and applicable human rights instruments. The resolution refers to the conscientious objection to military service as a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. However, Article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises that the exercise of such rights and freedom is subject to limitations to meet the requirements of public order and the general welfare of society.

National defence is a fundamental sovereign right under international law. As a small city-state with limited manpower and resources, Singapore has no choice but to base our defence on citizen armed forces.

National Service is the bedrock of our defence and internal security. It underpins the peace and prosperity we enjoy, and safeguards our independence and sovereignty. However, this system is only viable under the principle of universality by which every male Singapore Citizen and Permanent Resident, regardless of race or religion, fulfils their obligations to defend our country.

Singapore respects the constitutional right to freedom of religion. However, allowing individuals to avoid military service or choose alternative forms is unfair to those who serve, and will compromise the defence of Singapore.

National Service continues to enjoy overwhelming public support, with 96% of Singaporeans in 2020 polled agreeing that it is necessary for the security and prosperity of the country. Such strong support exists only because National Service in Singapore is universal, equitable, and underpinned by law.

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