

# **CONSCIENCE AND PEACE TAX INTERNATIONAL (CPTI)**

**Submission to the 144<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Committee for the attention of the Country Report Task Force on:**

## **GHANA**

**(Military service, conscientious objection and related issues)**

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**Contact:**

**Derek BRETT**

**Main Representative to the UN, Geneva**

**derekubrett@gmail.com**

**Tel: (41) 77 444 4420**

CPTI aims to supply information on all States with armed forces which report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) with regard to their military recruitment legislation and their recognition of the right of conscientious objection, even when there appear to be no urgent questions arising.

In association with the Child Rights International Network, CPTI also reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on States where there appear to be issues under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OPAC) on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and although these issues do not necessarily have implications for the ICCPR, such concerns are also reported in these submissions.

### **Summary**

Both before and since independence, the Ghanaian armed forces have been manned purely by voluntary recruitment. However at times the civilian National Service programme, first introduced in 1973 supposedly as an alternative to military service, has included a military training element, and there are current plans to reinstate this. At no time has the right of conscientious objection been recognised, either in the context of this training programme or for serving members of the armed forces.

## Latest Statistics<sup>1</sup>

POPULATION (November 2024, estimated)	34,589,000
proportion of males aged 15-19	5.0%
thus average annually reaching recruitment age :	345,890
ARMED FORCES: Active strength, November 2024	19,000
compared to the male population reaching recruitment age	5.5%
MILITARY EXPENDITURE: US \$ equivalent, estimated 2023	\$269m
Per capita	\$7.9
As % of GDP	0.4%

## Historical Background<sup>2</sup>

It seems that during the Second World War the British legislation authorising conscription was applicable in Ghana, then the British colony of the Gold Coast. However we can trace no report that conscription was ever implemented in the territory. Since independence Ghana has been free of involvement in international armed conflict or of significant internal strife, although the period from 1966 to 1981 was marked by a series of military coups. Civilian rule was restored in 1992, since when Ghana has been notable for the peaceful transfer of power between successive governments.

Following independence in 1957, Ghana continued in the British tradition to rely on voluntary recruitment to man its armed forces. The possibility of obligatory military service was first discussed following the 1972 military coup, but the National Union of Ghanaian Students successfully campaigned against this, promoting instead a system of civilian national service. A National Service scheme was duly introduced in 1973, under which graduates in certain fields were obliged to serve for one year immediately after graduating. Such schemes would appear to be inconsistent with the Convention on Forced Labour, exempted from the provisions of which are only service of a military nature or alternative service for conscientious objectors. However, as far as is known, the International Labour Office has never criticised on these grounds schemes of this nature, variants of which occur in several African States. The duration of service was increased under the 1980 National Service Act (No. 426) to two years, including a minimum of six months' military training, reduced after protest to eight weeks.

Under the Act, all men and women who reach the age of 18 must enrol in National Service on completion of their studies (but it is possible to perform one year of the service before proceeding to higher education). Educational institutions forward details of those liable to the National Service Secretariat. The position of those who do not complete formal education is not clear. The Act stipulates that those who do not complete national service may be sentenced to up to five years' imprisonment; however effective enforcement has, as is typical of other States, been through the civil disadvantages suffered by those who cannot show the National Service Certificate; they cannot obtain a passport, therefore cannot travel abroad, and are not eligible for public sector employment.

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- 1 Sources: For military expenditure, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute – SIPRI, April 2025. Otherwise, The Military Balance 2025 (International Institute of Strategic Studies, London), which bases its estimate on “demographic statistics taken from the US Census Bureau”.
  - 2 Information in this section from: Horeman, B. & Stolwijk, M., Refusing to Bear Arms, War Resisters International, London, 1998. [https://wri-irg.org/en/programmes/world\\_survey/country\\_report/en/Ghana](https://wri-irg.org/en/programmes/world_survey/country_report/en/Ghana)

Military careers are seen as prestigious, therefore there is no shortage of voluntary recruits and most tend to remain in the armed forces until retirement at age 55; fifteen years' service is usually required to qualify for a pension – this is reduced to ten years for some senior ranks. The armed forces have included women since the 1960's; initially they secondary school education was required, but they now must usually have a degree.

It is believed that it is possible for members of the armed forces to leave voluntarily, although there is little demand, but nothing is known of the procedures. There have never been any provisions relating to conscientious objection to military service.

Under Section 22 of the 1962 Armed Forces Act, desertion while on active service, or disobedience, are punishable by imprisonment, which may be for life. Desertion at other times carries a sentence of up to five years' imprisonment. (Section 27) The penalty for failure to report or prevent a planned desertion is two years' imprisonment. (Section 27). There was a report in 1991 that five trainees serving in Libya were summarily executed when they attempted to desert.

### Current situation

Little has been found in the way of updates on the above information, and although 25 years old it is believed largely to remain valid.

However the National Service Programme has changed over the years. At a date which cannot be ascertained, it seems that the military training element was dropped, and probably at the same time the duration of the service reverted to twelve months. Total recruitment figures are not available, but the National Service Secretariat website (nss.gov.gh) reveals that in 2025 the management of the National Service Authority released PIN codes for 18,011 trained nurses and midwives to enable them to enrol for National Service in the 2025/6 year, and separately that 13,700 trained teachers had been deployed on National Service – some thousands more had for technical or administrative reasons not yet been registered on the system. A reminder to enrol was also issued to “defaulters” who for one reason or another had not duly completed the National Service requirement in previous years.

As in other States, the question of a military training element is again being raised. On 27<sup>th</sup> February, in his first State of the Nation Address since being elected in January, President John Dramani Mahama (who had previously served in that from 2012 to 2014) proposed short-term military training for graduates to promote discipline, patriotism and physical readiness. Subsequently, and following a meeting between the leadership of the National Service Agency and the military high command it was announced on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2025 it was announced that as part of the National Service Emergency Response Readiness Programme up to two months of basic military training would be incorporated in the National Service programme from 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2025.<sup>3</sup> At no stage was it mentioned that this represented a reinstitution of a previous programme. Nor, unsurprisingly, was there any mention of conscientious objection.

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3 Ali, M. “National service personnel to begin basic military training from August 3”, Graphic Online, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2025 <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/national-service-personnel-to-begin-basic-military-training-from-august-3.html>

### Juvenile recruitment

Ghana ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2014,. Although it has yet to deliver its Report under the Optional Protocol, in its Declaration is stated categorically “the minimum age at which it permits voluntary recruitment into its National Armed Forces is 18 years”. There have been no reports of any abuses.

### **Suggestions for the List of Issues**

**Does the legislation of the State party contain any recognition of the right of conscientious objection to military service? The Committee is aware that military recruitment has generally been voluntary, but points out that even those who originally enlisted on a voluntary basis may subsequently develop conscientious objections. Have any requests from serving personnel for early release on such grounds been made in recent years? What procedures were, or would be, followed in such an event? On what terms would release be granted; what effect, for instance, would it have on eligibility for a pension? How soon would it take effect and would it have a suspensory effect against any subsequent orders to obey which would conflict with the grounds for the objection?**

**In particular, the Committee notes the current proposal to include a period of basic military training in the National Service requirement with effect from August this year. Is it intended to insert a provision in the regulations governing National Service permitting exemption from this part of the requirement on grounds of conscience?**