

**Q:** what do the UK, Iran, North Korea and Zimbabwe have in common?

**A:** they all recruit 16 year olds into their armed forces

The UK is the only country in Europe and one of only 20 countries worldwide to recruit 16 year olds into the military. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has urged the UK government to 'reconsider its active policy of recruitment of children into the armed forces'.

*We agree.*

The Council of Europe Recommendation on Human Rights of Members of the Armed Forces lists **rights and freedoms that should be respected and implemented in the armed forces** including that members of the armed forces have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; access to relevant information; the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others; and, enjoy the right to vote and to stand for election.

*We agree.*

## Human rights in the UK armed forces

**The Armed Forces Bill: an opportunity for change**

Every 5 years Parliament passes an Armed Forces Act which provides the basis for military law in the UK. This is an important opportunity to address issues relating to human rights in the military, including:

- concerns over the recruitment of under 18s for up to 6 years' service. There are also significant concerns over the ethics of recruitment practices.
- terms of service are complicated, confusing and severely restricting, yet unlike any other employment, breaching them can lead to a criminal conviction.
- the system for registering a conscientious objection is opaque and little information about it is available to serving personnel.
- those in the armed forces are excluded from much human rights legislation. They are not allowed to form a union, speak in public, join political organisations, or stand in an election.



## Human rights in the UK armed forces take action...take action...take action...

- send this postcard
- ask your MP to sign EDM 781 on Under 18s in the armed forces
- write to your MP with your concerns about recruitment of under 18s, unclear and restrictive terms of service, the lack of recognition of conscientious objection, and denial of other human rights.
- write a submission to the Armed Forces Bill Committee. See [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk) or contact us for more information.
- read the briefings on these issues on our website. Contact us on **020 7837 2822** if you would like them to be sent to you.
- let us know what you sent in and what response you got - [office@forceswatch.net](mailto:office@forceswatch.net)
- order free copies of this postcard
- sign up to ForcesWatch email announcements
- support our work

[www.forceswatch.net](http://www.forceswatch.net)

# ForcesWatch

Challenging the ethics of military recruitment

detach and retain

Dear Nick Harvey,

I am concerned that young people under 18 are recruited to military service for up to 6 years, with no discharge as of right beyond 6 months, and before they are deemed old enough to take on other adult responsibilities. In recent years, calls for the UK armed forces to reconsider their policy of recruiting under 18 have come from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UK Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Defence Committee.

For all personnel, restrictive terms of service mean that those wishing to leave are unable to do so without risking a criminal conviction. There are around 2,300 cases of absence without leave each year and there is much evidence to suggest that most of those who want to leave on ethical, moral or religious grounds are unaware of their right to conscientious objection.

**I ask you to use the Armed Forces Bill to address human rights in the armed forces:**

- set a timeframe for phasing out recruitment of under 18s and introduce discharge as of right in the meantime
- unify and reduce the minimum length of service for all personnel
- introduce a transparent and open process for conscientious objection
- address human rights concerns over freedom of expression and freedom of assembly for service personnel.

**I look forward to your reply.**

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

please  
affix  
stamp  
here

**Nick Harvey MP**  
**Minister for the Armed Forces**  
**Ministry of Defence**  
**Main Building**  
**Whitehall**  
**London**  
**SW1A 2HB**

This card has been produced by ForcesWatch,  
5 Caledonian Rd, London N1 9DY. 020 7837 2822,  
[office@forceswatch.net](mailto:office@forceswatch.net), [www.forceswatch.net](http://www.forceswatch.net)