

CHURCH LEADERS CALL FOR GENUINE ALTERNATIVE SERVICE

We join our voices to the many who are calling for an end to conscription. We believe that all conscripts should be given the right to choose whether to participate in the SADF or to do genuine alternative service.

The past year and a half has seen a deepening of civil conflict in our country, a situation epitomized by the use of white army conscripts within black townships. Conscription forces young white men into a position of tragic confrontation with their fellow South Africans. This not only increases tension and bitterness in our divided country but causes enormous pastoral problems for our churches.

Christian teaching and tradition allows only two possible approaches to issues of violence and war - pacifism or support of a 'just war'. Yet South African legislation at present recognizes only religious pacifists as conscientious objectors - in a highly unsatisfactory manner. In addition many other conscripts, who do not qualify as religious objectors, have serious moral objections to participation in the SADF.

We believe that all individuals, whether christian or not, should be allowed to choose to act in accordance with their conscience in whether to participate in the SADF or not.

Therefore we call on the government to:

1. Provide genuine alternative service to all conscripts who in good conscience object to training in the SADF. This service should be work which allows for the utilization of the individuals skills, talents and creativity.
2. To make alternative service available in religious and welfare organizations. At present alternative service can only be rendered in government departments.
3. Remove the many punitive conditions attached to community service at present. For example, religious objectors have to do six years continuous service whereas conscripts normally serve a maximum of three and a third years (initial training plus camps).

Alternative service is a worthwhile option and objectors should not be punished for their beliefs and for living out the demands of their integrity.

For these reasons we support the ECC's Working For A Just Peace Campaign in its demonstration of the variety of constructive ways young people can provide genuine national service.

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