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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CURRENT SYSTEMS OF ALTERNATIVE SERVICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## CURRENT SYSTEMS OF ALTERNATIVE SERVICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

### Main Findings

1. The possibility for conscripts to perform alternative service does exist, although it is of a very restrictive and limited nature. The provision for religious objectors was introduced in 1982 in response to a growing wave of conscientious objectors.

2. The Board for Religious Objectors provides only for bona fide religious pacifists to do alternative service. Objector status is granted to an applicant with whose religious convictions it is conflict to render one of the following three forms of service:

- \* service in a combatant capacity in any armed force;
- \* service in a combatant capacity in any armed force, to perform any maintenance task of a combatant nature therein and to be clothed in a military uniform; or
- \* any military service or to undergo any military training or to perform any task in or in connection with any armed force.

The process of applying for status as a community server can be difficult, although the Board is fair in its operation.

3. A special dispensation has been created for Jehova's Witnesses who refuse to recognise the authority of the Board.

4. Community servers experience many difficulties regarding placement and conditions of service. The system operates punitively in terms of length and conditions of service. There is limited scope for placement. Salaries are meagre and the life of a community server could be seen as a hard one.

Community servers have made numerous attempts to improve their conditions. Certain improvements have been made, although the relationship between servers and the Department of Manpower, which is responsible for administering their affairs, has at times been strained.

5. In addition to calls for the improvement of the conditions of their service the National Community Servers Group has made requests for alternative service to be available to broader categories of people, for it to be

available in the non-state sectors, and for it not to be punitive in nature.

6. Non-military forms of national service which do not depend on conscientious objection as a prerequisite are available on a very limited basis. Such forms of service do not exclude the possibility that the national servicemen would be obliged to perform military duties. Qualification for such service is based on a decision of the Minister of Defence following representations from the serviceman's employer. Once accorded such status the serviceman falls under the authority of his employer and not the SADF. A number of servicemen have been deployed in this way at, e.g. the Small Business Development Corporation and Armscor. Those that have qualified for such service have in general been those with particularly high-level skills.

7. The current system of alternative service has both great limits as well as certain possibilities. The restrictive and punitive nature of current alternatives are key drawbacks. The present systems, however, do contain the seeds of an expanded policy. They embody the principle that non-military forms of national service are legitimate and need to be considered. This principle is crucial in building alternative policy.

8. In constructing alternative policy caution needs to be taken to avoid the pitfalls of current alternatives wherever possible.

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