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GENERAL SECRETARIATE
of the S.A. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

ALGEMENE SEKRETARIAAT
van die S.A. KATOLIEKE BISKOPSRAAD

from/van
Press Officer

for release/vir publikasie
IMMEDIATE

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) has called for an end to military conscription and an amendment to the Defence Act to make this possible.

This call has come about as a result of concern at the grave situation in Southern Africa and at the growing numbers of young men facing a crisis of conscience over their conscription into the South African Defence Force (SADF).

The SACBC said in a statement released today (June 23): "Our concern as Bishops of Southern Africa is for a speedy and just solution to the problems experienced by the people in Southern Africa, a solution in which all sectors of the population are called to play their part.

"We are concerned at the growing numbers of young men faced with a crisis of conscience caused by their conscription.

"The choices for men facing this crisis are:

- * Serving in an army with whose mode of operation they cannot agree.
- * Doing six years' alternate service if they are recognised religious pacifists.
- * Serving a six year jail sentence if they object to the war on the grounds that they believe it to be unjust.
- * Leaving the country and living in exile.

Re:	Sarah Crowe (press officer) Tel. 6187855	Date:	June 23 1985	Ref.	
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"We recognise that an end to conscription would leave membership of the SADF open to those who are in sympathy with it and would grant individuals freedom of conscience in determining their response to the situation.

"Therefore we join our voices with those who have already asked for an end to conscription and we call on the Government to amend the Defence Act to make this possible.

"We also encourage Catholics to help promote peace by working for an end to conscription in whatever way lies open to them."

Explaining the background to their call, the Bishops said many national servicemen experienced turmoil when they became aware of the role they were expected to play in black townships and elsewhere in Southern Africa.

"As far back as 1977 in our statement 'On Conscientious Objection' we defended the right of every individual to follow his or her own conscience; the right therefore to conscientious objection both on the grounds of individual pacifism and on the grounds that a person may seriously believe the war to be unjust.

"The same year, we urged the Government to make provision for alternative forms of non-military national service, as is found in other parts of the world.

"In 1983, in a letter to the Minister of Defence about the proposed Defence Amendment Act, we pointed out that the proposed amendments -- making it possible for Christian pacifists to refuse military training -- did not go far enough.

"Provision should also be made for so-called moral or ethical objectors. At that time we stated that if such an amendment was not included in the Defence Amendment Act, we would find it necessary to reject the Act as unjust," the statement adds.

In the light of the fact that the suggested amendment was not included, the SACBC has now repeated its call for an amendment.

NOTE:

The SACBC has invited Cardinal Paulo Arns (profile included in enclosed leaflet) of Brazil to South Africa, where he will address the first ever peace festival aimed at ending conscription.

The Cardinal will arrive in Johannesburg on Wednesday June 26 and, together with SACBC president Archbishop Denis Hurley, will speak at a public meeting on "Society in Conflict" at the Johannesburg Cathedral at 10am on Sunday June 30.

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END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

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