

FACT SHEET: SOUTH AFRICAN WAR RESISTERS IN EXILE

White South African men are required to spend a total of two years military service in the South African Defence Force (SADF). Having completed the initial year of service, conscripts are required to attend month-long 'camps' which total another year of military service. Call-ups are issued for February and August of each year.

The penalties for refusing to serve in the SADF are high. Religious objection is only allowed within very narrow categories, and there is no provision for political or moral objectors to get alternative service. Conscripts who refuse to serve are liable to be prosecuted in court and to receive jail sentences of up to 3 years.

There are few options for draft-resisters in South Africa. Avoiding the call-up means living 'underground', going to jail, or leaving the country. It is estimated that, since the mid-1970's, over 10 000 young South African men have left the country to avoid conscription. There are South African War Resisters in the UK, Holland, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Mauritius, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Under the Pretoria minute, war resisters can be described as exiles and repatriated to South Africa, but they still face the call-up when they return. A survey of the international war resister community was carried out by the Huddleston International Register of South African War Resisters this year. Some of the features of the war resister community are described below:

Surveyed war resisters are white South African men ranging in age from 19 to 42 years. (The average age is approx 30 years.) Over 100 war resisters responded, from countries in Europe, North America, Southern Africa and elsewhere.

The first war resisters arrived in Europe in 1974, and the most recent in 1990. There have been two important waves of war resisters in recent years. Nearly 20% of current war resisters left South Africa in 1986, in the wake of the mid-1980's insurrection and subsequent repression under the State of Emergency. Another significant group (12%) left South Africa in 1989, the year that ^{after} three conscientious objectors were sentenced to maximum jail terms under the Defence Act.

Over 40% of war resisters in this survey have citizenship in their country of exile; in many cases, citizenship has been acquired after years of 'statelessness'. 30% of respondents in this survey are currently defined as refugees in their country of exile.

The vast majority of exiled war resisters (68%) have not performed any military service. Of the 32% who have completed some service in the SADF, most still face call-ups for 'camps'. Some of the war resisters in this survey have deserted from the SADF and face court-martial if they return to South Africa.

FURTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE FROM COSAWR tel (071) 733-3478

STATEMENT BY RETURNING WAR RESISTERS, NOVEMBER 1990

We, the undersigned, are South Africans who left our country rather than serve in the South African Defence Force (SADF). We are now ending our exile and returning home.

We left South Africa because of our commitment to the struggle for peace and justice in our country. Conscription into the SADF is incompatible with our belief that apartheid is indefensible. We feel duty-bound to oppose it in all its forms. Military service in the SADF has directly contributed to the suffering and misery of millions of people in South Africa and the Frontline States.

We are returning with no guarantees about our safety, nor immunity from prosecution. We risk being prosecuted for refusing to serve in the SADF.

We refuse to serve in the SADF since it defends the interests of the white minority. We demand that the defence of our country is brought under the democratic control of all South Africans.

To encourage the return of other exiled war resisters, we call upon the South African government to end conscription and to guarantee the safe return of all exiles.

We also call for a reconstruction programme to address the damage that has been done in the whole Southern African region as the result of the militarist strategies pursued by this government and their proxy forces in the subcontinent.

We are returning because we are committed to the struggle to build a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa.

RETURNING WAR RESISTERS

Theo Chaplin
Phillip Dexter
Roger Field
Fritz Joubert
Francois Krige
Dorian Love
Gregg Murray
Gerald O'Sullivan
Guy Slingsby
Matthew Temple

PROFILE: RETURNING WAR RESISTER: PHILLIP DEXTER

NAME: Phillip Dexter

AGE: 27

HOME TOWN: Pietermaritzburg

PLACE OF EXILE: England

PERIOD OF EXILE: 7½ years

QUALIFICATIONS / EMPLOYMENT: Currently studying

STATEMENT:

I left South Africa to live in exile because I felt it was my only option. Jail seemed an ominous prospect, and conscientious objectors were not organised as they are today. Since I had little knowledge and experience politically, I honestly believed I could go into exile and make a positive effort to involve myself in the broad anti-apartheid struggle.

I feel the period of exile is now over. The new climate following the announcements on February 2nd obliges us all to commit ourselves to this final phase of the struggle to end apartheid, and ensure its success. This we can best achieve by returning home and engaging the regime face-on.

I hope to become involved in politics at all levels and to participate in the construction of a prosperous, stable, egalitarian and democratic non-racial South Africa. I intend to finish my degree, which has, so far, been disrupted by call-ups. I would like to study further, but this will depend on funds.

I will not serve in the South African Defence Force until it becomes precisely that, a defence force. At present, the racist composition of the military, the fact that it is not under democratic control, and the methods used by the military to carry out the wishes of the National Party leaders make it impossible for any democrat to serve in this institution. As and when this situation changes, I will reconsider my position, but until South Africa is a non-racial, democratic and free society, it will be my duty to refuse to serve in the SADF.

PROFILE: RETURNING WAR RESISTER: ROGER FIELD

NAME: Roger Field

AGE: 35

HOME TOWN: Cape Town

PLACE OF EXILE: England

PERIOD OF EXILE: 11 years

QUALIFICATIONS / EMPLOYMENT: Researcher

STATEMENT:

I left South Africa primarily because of conscription, though I had no idea, at the time, that the SADF would play such a crucial role in maintaining apartheid in the years to come.

I am returning because, in a very simple and fundamental way, it seems right. Hopefully, it will give me the opportunity to make a contribution to building a new South Africa.

I hope for a strong and stable ANC government that can take our country forward in a spirit of reconciliation and reconstruction. In particular, I hope for moves towards an integrated and effective armed force that serves the people, not just the interests of the few.

I will refuse to serve in the SADF as long as it continues to maintain minority rule and apartheid.

PROFILE: RETURNING WAR RESISTER: FRITZ JOUBERT

NAME: Fritz Joubert

AGE: 23

HOME TOWN: Paarl, Cape

PLACE OF EXILE: England

PERIOD OF EXILE: 6 years

QUALIFICATIONS / EMPLOYMENT: Carpenter

STATEMENT:

I left South Africa because of my refusal to serve in the SADF. My refusal was not based on religious or pacifist grounds, but rather, on a deeply held conviction that the SADF was upholding apartheid, both in the role that it played in the townships, as well as in the frontline States. I also supported the armed struggle being waged by our people under the banner of Umkhonto We Sizwe. Serving in the SADF would have gone against all these views that I held.

At the age of 17, I was obviously not willing to serve a six-year jail sentence, so I ended up taking what was seen by many as the 'easy way out'. I left Cape Town in December 1984, a very naive 17 year-old.

For the first couple of years in exile, the possibility of my return was so remote that I tried to put South Africa behind me and build a new life for myself. This proved impossible. I soon came to realise that there was no escaping the fact that I was South African and that I felt I had to make a contribution towards the liberation of our country. I became involved in South African politics in London.

I have now decided to return to South Africa to force the government on the issue of conscription. It is highly contradictory for the government to continue apartheid conscription in the present climate. I will continue to refuse to serve in the SADF and am willing to be jailed for my stand.

I am an Afrikaner and would therefore like to work within the Afrikaans community to dispel some of the myths and fears that are so widely held.

I also want to go to a decent beach again !

PROFILE: RETURNING WAR RESISTER: GREGG MURRAY

NAME: Gregg Murray

AGE: 21

HOME TOWN: Cape Town

PLACE OF EXILE: England

PERIOD OF EXILE: 1½ years

QUALIFICATIONS / EMPLOYMENT: Teacher

STATEMENT:

I left South Africa in 1989 for personal reasons. My English girlfriend and I decided to have our child in England.

While in England, I found that I was still receiving call-ups in South Africa, despite having been classified as 'G5' (exempt from military service) the previous year on the grounds of physical disability. I have no right hand.

I have since written to the exemption board on several occasions and even to Magnus Malan, seeking an explanation, which came in the form of a call-up to Infantry in Phalaborwa.

I see the return as a perfect opportunity to force the SADF to decide on my case, one way or the other. At the same time, it enables me to state my opposition to the SADF and all it stands for.

Once in South Africa, I will look for a teaching post in Cape Town.

PROFILE: RETURNING WAR RESISTER: GERALD O'SULLIVAN

NAME: Gerald O'Sullivan

AGE: 29

HOME TOWN: Johannesburg

PLACE OF EXILE: England

PERIOD OF EXILE: 4 years

QUALIFICATIONS / EMPLOYMENT: Computer consultant

STATEMENT:

I left South Africa solely to avoid being called-up. My political views were very unclear at that stage, but I knew for sure that there was no way I could serve in the army. I had heard enough about what went on in Namibia and Angola - brutality against civilians, occupation, invasion and, in 1984, occupying the townships - to reject any idea of serving in the SADF.

After five years of living overseas, I feel more like a South African than ever before. I am also more convinced that there is a real possibility of destroying apartheid and building a non-racial, democratic, just and sane South Africa.

I am returning, with the skills and perspectives I have acquired living in London, to take part in the process of transformation and rebuilding.

Only when apartheid has been ended, and the military apparatus that underpins it has been replaced, will our future be safe.

PROFILE: RETURNING WAR RESISTER: FRANCOIS KRIGE

NAME: Francois Krige

AGE: 22

HOMETOWN: Cape Town

PLACE OF EXILE: Africa, Germany, England

PERIOD OF EXILE: 3½ years

QUALIFICATIONS / EMPLOYMENT: Freelance landscape gardener

STATEMENT:

I left South Africa in 1987 because I was being called up for National Service. I felt that I could not serve in the SADF in any capacity, due to their involvement in the Angolan war and their oppressive role in the townships, implementing the State of Emergency and apartheid rule. Furthermore, I felt that the racial nature of conscription was effectively brutalising white and black youth against each other.

I spent my first year of exile travelling in Africa, living for a short time in Zaire and Kenya. After living for two years in West Germany, I came to live in England.

I do not find exile unendurable in any way, yet, this November I shall return to South Africa to make a firm stand against conscription. If necessary, I will stand trial for refusing to serve. I do this with the conviction that white conscription is a growing problem in the changing South Africa.

Racist conscription in any form, with or without alternative service, can only make worse the problems of a racist, brutalised society. It cannot be compatible with the attempts of a society to move away from polarisation, or with the attempts of a military force to move away from domination by the ideology of conservative Afrikanerdom.

PROFILE: RETURNING WAR RESISTER: DORIAN LOVE

NAME: Dorian Love

AGE: 29

HOME TOWN: Johannesburg

PLACE OF EXILE: England

PERIOD OF EXILE: 4½ years

QUALIFICATIONS / EMPLOYMENT: Teacher

STATEMENT:

Throughout my schooling, it was the military ethos encouraged by the State that most came to symbolise apartheid for me. My classmates dreamed of joining elite units and spoke openly of white supremacy backed up by military machismo. Conscription was an impassable barrier in my life. Without doing military service, I could not pursue my chosen career in the teaching profession. Since I felt I could never submit to it and look myself in the shaving-mirror again, the only options were jail or exile. Hence my decision to leave the country.

Life in exile has not been easy, although, over time, it became comfortable. I have come to enjoy a new identity as a Londoner, and mix with people from all over the world. However, distance has also led me to discover my identity as a South African in ways I never dreamed of before. I found myself longing to return, despite the initial sense of relief I felt at having left. I think everyone should live for a time outside their native communities for the new perspectives and challenges that this makes possible. However, I believe that this is the right time for me to return; not only because of the new climate since February and the promise that exiles can return, but because I feel compelled by sheer gut longing. I am longing to see friends and family again, to visit places special to me, and to eat gem-squash (unobtainable for love or money in London). It is when contrasted with these simple things that war and violence seem unconscionable.

The problem of conscription still remains, and I will be eligible for call-up on my return. Now that the government has conceded the need for negotiations, the contradictions in its position are even more stark. It is particularly important that conscription be ended now, as this would give a clear signal that the government is moving away from the terror tactics of the past and instead is seeking open-handedness and an end to war. By returning as part of this group, still refusing to serve in the army, I hope to add my voice more effectively to those calling for an end to conscription.

PROFILE: RETURNING WAR RESISTER: GUY SLINGSBY

NAME: Guy Slingsby

AGE: 32

HOME TOWN: Cape Town

PLACE OF EXILE: England

PERIOD OF EXILE: 5 years

STATEMENT:

I wish to see my friends and family. I'm hoping for reconciliation and resolve. I do not believe in conscription, and support the legacy of struggles supporting non-violent change.

PROFILE: RETURNING WAR RESISTER: MATTHEW TEMPLE

NAME: Matthew Temple

AGE: 27

HOME TOWN: Pietermaritzburg

PLACE OF EXILE: England

PERIOD OF EXILE: 4½ years

QUALIFICATIONS / EMPLOYMENT: Teacher

STATEMENT:

I refuse to serve in the SADF because I believe that military conscription of white men is contrary to public interest in South Africa. Until such time as a new constitution, which ensures the legal basis for a non-racial and democratic South Africa, has been adopted through democratic procedures, I refuse to recognise the authority of the current administration to conscript me to serve in a racist army.

In 1986, there seemed to be no end in sight to a prolonged civil war between the black communities and the authorities and their security forces. I was not prepared to become a part of the security forces and be implicated in a war on the wrong side. I was not prepared to become involved militarily at all. I had the available finance to buy a ticket out of the country, with the hope that I would escape the war. I was also drawn by curiosity to discover what London was like to live and work in.

I am going back because I miss so many things about South Africa, which I consider to be my home. I have spent long enough outside the country, and feel that, despite personal difficulties I might encounter (like being prosecuted), I want to part of the country's transition. I believe that my actions, and those of the other individuals who are returning with me, will contribute positively. It is possible that our actions can assist in ending the current system of conscription and lead the way for many other exiled war resisters to return home.

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END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

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