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Students' Representative Council



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

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Date: 5 November 1987

S T A T E M E N T

The SRC salutes the courageous decision of Dr Ivan Toms. He has chosen to go to jail for three years rather than to fight against his fellow South Africans.

We condemn the Government for requiring such sacrifices of the very people whose love for their country goes beyond the desire for personal comfort and which love is expressed in the willingness to serve the best interests of its people.

We call on the Government to provide appropriate alternatives for people who refuse, on moral or political grounds, to serve in the SADF.

WITS SRC EXECUTIVE

PRESS RELEASE - PERSVERKLARING

GENERAL SECRETARIATE

ALGEMENE SEKRETARIAAT

of the S.A. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

van die S.A. KATOLIEKE BISKOPSRaad

from/van

for release/vir publikasie

Noel Bruyns
SACBC Information/Press Officer

IMMEDIATE

Press statement 40/87

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

In August the "Cape Town 23" - a group of conscientious objectors - publicly stated they refused to serve in the South African Defence Force. On Thursday, November 12, Dr Ivan Toms, one of the 23, faces call-up. He is the first of the group to face being sent to prison for refusing to do military service because doing so would be in conflict with his conscience.

We repeat our call to the authorities to alter the law concerning compulsory military service, to allow conscripts to object to doing military service not only on religious grounds, but also on conscientious grounds.

We also call for an alternative to the law which would allow conscientious objectors to do alternative community service for a period equivalent to the period of military service. Such an alteration in the law would allow the medical work which Dr Toms is presently doing in the poorest squatter areas in Cape Town to qualify as national service.

The universal Church has always defended the right and duty of all people in all situations, while acting in good faith, to follow their conscience.

As the executive of the Catholic Church in South Africa, we - the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference Administrative Board - encourage all priests to give spiritual guidance and counselling to those men considering the option of conscientious objection.

Signed by:
Bishop Reginald Orsmond
SACBC Vice-President
on behalf of the SACBC Administrative Board

Re: Conscientious objectors

Date: 09.11.87
Datum:

Ref. NB

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STATEMENT ON IVAN TOMS

The SACC, in its 1987 National Conference, adopted a resolution regarding the SADF in which it resolved to:

- (a) Call upon people to reject conscription until there is a universal franchise in a unitary state;
- (b) to encourage member churches to support those who undertake to do this.

In 1986 the then General Secretary Dr Beyers Naude wrote a letter to the State President (endorsed by the National Conference) in which he stated that "compulsory conscription to military services is a violation of the individual conscience..... in the matter of military conscription in South Africa. It is therefore the duty of those whose consciences tend them to believe that compulsory military service is wrong to work to persuade the government to end the system.

The SACC believes that Dr Ivan Toms is a man of conscience. He has proved this in his compassion for and tireless work amongst the poor and oppressed in the SACLA clinic in Crossroads. Such a man is a true servant of God and should not be treated as a criminal but be granted the right of serving his country in a way that will not betray his beliefs but rather allow them to be expressed in furthering the work for true justice and reconciliation in South Africa. Refusing to participate in an unjust struggle against his fellow country men and rather wishing to serve people as a Christian in a way that does not further the divisions of apartheid, is surely to be lauded rather than condemned.

To conclude in the words of the previous SACC General Secretary in his letter to the State President:

"If we believe that God speaks to those who do not acknowledge his existence, then we must respect the human conscience as we respect the voice of God!"

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END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

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