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11 October 1986

Dear Sir/Madam

The Possibility of People Doing Community Service by Working in Your
Organization as an Alternative to Military Service

Recently an opportunity has arisen of making representations to parliament to propose the extension of the scope of "Community Service" to non-government organizations. The success of such representations depends to a large extent on the support of organizations such as yours for this proposal.

We write on behalf of the National Community Servers' Group which is composed of young men who are doing their "Community Service". "Community Service" has been a recognized legal alternative to military service since 1983. We have chosen this option because we wish to be peacemakers and to serve the wider community in South Africa, especially the underprivileged and the needy.

At present the Defence Act restricts community service solely to central, provincial and local government departments. We believe this is excessively narrow, making it impossible for us in many cases to find work which uses our training and abilities and which is of genuine service to the community. Thus we are endeavouring to widen the scope of Community Service placement.

The widening of the scope of placement of Community Servers could have important benefits for your organization. Community Servers would be committed to the aims of your organization and many have university trainings that may be appropriate and suited to your field of work. In addition our services would be free.

For your information we set out the position more fully under the following headings:

Community Service

The Parliamentary Standing Committee

Proposed Changes to the Law

Possible Benefits to Your Organization

How You Can Help

Community Service

Since 1983 Community Service has become a legally recognized form of national service for religious objectors (in lieu of military service). A National Serviceman may apply to a Board to be classified for Community Service. The Board tests for bona fide religious convictions and for universal pacifism.

If his application is accepted it becomes the responsibility of the Department of Manpower to place him in a central, provincial, or local government post. (He now has no further links with the SADF). In many cases the Department of Manpower has struggled to find positions for people with certain qualifications. This narrow scope means that Community Servers are placed in ordinary civil service jobs and do work which is often mundane and bureaucratic. If the scope of placement were to be widened their training could be used far more effectively in the service of the wider community.

The Community Server serves a continuous period of up to six years which is equal to one and a half times his remaining national service. He is paid a salary ranging from R155 to R550 per month depending on marital status and educational qualifications as well as a living allowance of R250 per month if he is not given accommodation by his employer. There is also finance available for travel and subsistence while on business. This money comes out of the Defence budget and is administered by the Department of Manpower. This means that there is no financial burden whatsoever on an organization that employs a Community Server.

The employment of a Community Server is governed by regulations promulgated by the Minister of Manpower in the Government Gazette of 30 March 1984. These regulations govern such things as remuneration, leave, medical benefits and administrative control over the Community Server.

Since the commencement of the Board in 1984, over 100 people from recognized Christian denominations have been classified as Community Servers. The majority are university graduates with a variety of trainings: medicine, law, teaching, engineering, commerce, science, theology, social work, etc. About 500 Jehovah's Witnesses, who are mainly school leavers, have also been classified. Unfortunately we cannot speak on their behalf as we have had little contact with them as yet.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee

In August of this year the parliamentary Standing Committee for Defence began consideration of a Bill amending certain aspects of the provisions for Community Service. Their terms of reference deal mainly with the length of community service and unfortunately do not cover the scope of placement, which we regard as one of the most important issues. We approached them on this issue and they appeared to be sympathetic. They have asked us to request the Minister of Defence to widen their terms of reference. We believe that for us to succeed in this we would need to show that a significant number of organizations such as yours would be willing to employ Community Servers.

We anticipate that the Standing Committee will meet early in December. This may be the only opportunity in a number of years to get the Act changed in this respect and for that reason urgent and well-thought out action is necessary. Already a number of non-government organizations have expressed enthusiasm to help. Any correspondence from your organization at the moment would increase the possibility of suitable amendments being made.

Proposed Changes to the Law

We will be proposing that the Minister of Manpower be given discretion to place Community Servers with approved welfare, religious, educational or development organizations. If this is accepted, we envisage that organizations could approach the Minister to have themselves approved as a potential placement option. A Community Server could then approach an approved organization, applying to render Community Service with it. If the organization concerned agrees to employ him, it would then approach the Department of Manpower to make the necessary arrangements. The Community Server

would be required to abide by the regulations governing Community Service, and his employer would be required to submit periodic reports on his behaviour.

Possible Benefits to Your Organization

We believe that many welfare organizations are under increasing pressure caused by the escalating social dislocation and current economic depression in our country. We feel that Community Servers would be able to assist to some extent in this situation. We have chosen to give long periods of our working lives in service of the community. Many of us have professional training in fields which could be useful to a variety of welfare and non-government organizations. The length of time for which we are committed will mean that experience and training that we receive in employment will remain with our employers for a long time. This will build continuity. In addition, our direct employers are not responsible for our salary, accomodation and travel expenses.

How You Can Help

If you are in favour of our proposals we request that you:

1. Write a letter from your organization to the Minister of Defence requesting that the scope of Community Service (governed by Section 72E.(4) of the Defence Act) be widened to include your organization, setting out why you feel that this is desirable. This letter should arrive by the end of November. We suggest that you include the following in your letter:
 - a) the aims and a brief history of your organization,
 - b) the type of work in which you could use Community Servers (possibly include a brief job description),
 - c) what qualifications you would require or could use,
 - d) a short brochure on your organization.

Please write to: The Hon. Minister of Defence
 Private Bag X427
 Pretoria
 0001

And send copies to:

Mr W.J.Hefer
Defence Standing Committee
P.O.Box 653
Standerton
2430

Judge W.Edeling
Board for Religious Objection
Private Bag X20521
Bloemfontein
9300

and to us: Rolfe Eberhard
 9 Roosevelt Road
 Claremont
 7700

2. Fill in the attached questionnaire: we would like to collect information from a number of welfare and non-government organizations in order to gauge the extent of support for this proposal. This will help in our representations to the standing committee. Please return it (with the copy of your letter to the Minister of Defence) to Rolfe Eberhard at the above address.
3. Lobby support for this proposal with people who are influential in this regard.

Thank you very much for reading this. We hope it receives your favourable attention. We would like to stress that we believe there are major gains to be made if the Act is changed and we would appreciate your careful consideration of this matter. We would be very happy to answer any questions you have - please contact Rolfe Eberhard at the address or telephone numbers at the top of the letter.

Yours sincerely

Rolfe Eberhard	B.Sc (Chem Eng)	<i>Rolfe</i>
Christopher Swart	B.A. Hons, B.A.Hons, B.Juris, (L.L.B.)	<i>Swart</i>
Richard Gosnell	B.Sc (Chem Eng), (MSc Eng)	<i>R.J.Gosnell</i>
James Thomas	B.Soc Sc	<i>Thomas</i>
Christopher Geerdts	B.Sc (Elec Eng), (MSc Eng)	<i>Geerdts</i>
Peter Kantor	B.Comm, L.L.B.	<i>Kantor</i>

On behalf of the National Community Servers' Group

QUESTIONNAIRE

BROADENING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR PLACEMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVERS

Name of Organization _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Name and position of Contact Person _____

1. Does your organization support the proposal that non-governmental organizations be allowed to employ community servers.

Yes:

No:

2. Would your organization be willing to employ such a person in a full-time position?

Yes:

No:

3. The Act at present provides that Alternative Service must be one and a half times the length of military service still due.

Would your organization be willing to employ a community server for:-

a) The maximum continuous period of six years: Yes: No:

b) A continuous period of 1-3 years: Yes: No:

c) Annual 45-day periods for a number of years: Yes: No:

4 a) Please underline qualifications which would be useful to your organization.

ADMINISTRATION

TECHNICAL

MEDICAL

HUMANITIES

Administration

Pure Science

Medicine

Theology

Accounting

Architecture

Para-medicine

Social Work

Media Skills

Agriculture

Pharmacy

Law

Market Research

Computers

Nursing

Psychology

Librarianship

Construction

Lang. skills

Personnel Mngmnt

Surveying

Teaching

Chemistry

Computer Educn

Engineering

Anthropology

-chemical

Economics

-electrical

-mechanical

-civil

-biomedical

Any other (Please specify) _____

4 b) Please elaborate (if necessary) on your qualification requirements, and the job descriptions of any possible posts you have in mind.

5. Would your organization be able to employ school-leavers

Yes:

No:

If yes, in what capacity? -----

6. Where could your employee be based. -----

7. In the event of the NATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVERS' GROUP wishing to make use of this information, for example in approaching the government to make further amendments to the law, would you agree to the name of your organisation being mentioned?

Yes:

No:

8 a) What administrative problems (if any) do you envisage in the employment of community servers?

8 b) What clarifications would you require as to how this would work in practice?

9. Additional comments:-

Please return the questionnaire to :-
Rolfe Eberhard
9 Roosevelt Road
7700 Claremont

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

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