

End Conscription Campaign

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South Africa

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A10.5.5.183

Dear Friends

The End Conscription Campaign has been launched to campaign against compulsory military conscription into the South African Defence Force. The campaign has been growing in strength especially as more young conscripts are facing a growing crisis of conscience by being called on to perform active duty within South Africa's war-torn townships. Within the 18 months of the campaign's existence 6 regional committees have been formed, involving some 40 affiliated organisations.

The success of the campaign was shown recently when we held a "STOP THE CALL-UP" Peace Festival, involving some 400 ECC activists and about 4000 members of the public who have expressed interest in the message of the ECC. Part of the interest of our work has been to illicit international support for the campaign especially as such support serves to boost our morale as we often work under very difficult and alienating conditions. I have thus put together a package of material to inform your organisation of our work.

Included in the package is a detailed description of the campaign that was put together as evidence for a Commission of enquiry into the SADF. I have also included two statements by a National Serviceman who has served in the townships during the recent unrest, and by a woman who was raped by two soldiers in Cradock in the Eastern Cape. There is also a copy of the programme of our festival held in June and a short booklet that outlines the demands of the campaign as expressed in our declaration. I have also included a motivation for a "TROOPS OUT" campaign that is to be launched on the 17 September. We are hoping that your organisation would be able to launch some form of solidarity action which could include a fast in solidarity with the fast that will be taking place from the 6 to 7 October, the culmination of the campaign in South Africa. We would also appreciate any messages of support from organisations supporting us. These can be sent to the address above, or telexed/phoned to the numbers above.

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International solidarity is essential for the creation of justice and peace throughout the world. Your contribution to our struggle would be greatly appreciated and would further our campaign to bring to an end the compulsory conscription of young whites into the Apartheid armed forces.

Hoping that you can support us.

In peace and solidarity

Stephen Lowry

For the National Committee

ECC Statement

Members of the End Conscription Campaign who were present at the court martial made the following statement afterwards, "Alan Dodson's conviction in public court martial points to a crisis that the SADF is facing within its own ranks. Alan was convicted for failing to comply with a command to participate in a Reaction Unit patrol which was equipped to handle township unrest.

The involvement of the SADF in the townships highlights its increasingly political role. The need for individuals like Alan to be given freedom of conscience, as regards their going into the townships is ever more urgent."

Ex-PMB Law Student sentenced for refusing to go into the townships



"I object to the use of force by the SADF in quelling township unrest as this can be solved only by addressing the causes of apartheid."

Alan Dodson

NO to SADF involvement in the townships

As the role of the SADF in maintaining apartheid is becoming increasingly apparent, a growing number of young conscripts have declared their support for the ECC's call to end conscription and withdrawal of troops from the townships. For many young men already in the army, the presence of the SADF in the townships is an intolerable situation.

What happens when a soldier refuses to go into the townships?

On Monday the 13th of August, Alan Dodson, a former Pietermaritzburg University law student currently doing a one month camp in the SADF, was currently found guilty at a Natal court martial of having disobeyed his orders to go on a vehicle patrol and sentenced to a fine of R600.

Alan went into the army after leaving school and did fourteen months border duty for which he received a Pro Patria. He then studied law at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg and graduated B.Comm LLB Cum Laude in 1984. He was doing his articles with a legal firm in Cape Town when he was called up to do a one month camp with the Number One Reconnaissance Unit in Durban at the end of last year.

Alan was extremely perturbed by the briefing he and other soldiers received. They were told, in racist and offensive language that they might have to assist the SAP in containing township unrest. He immediately informed the Unit's Welfare Officer that he was not prepared to do township duty and was told that his views would be accommodated as far as possible. This in fact happened and during the camp he did only guard duty.

When he was called up for a July camp this year, he reiterated his position and once again was allowed to do guard

duty. But on the 31st of July he was ordered to go on a vehicle patrol which he felt might involve being deployed in a township. He refused to obey his order.

At his court martial Alan was clear that he fully understood military discipline and authority but would disobey an order which conflicted in a fundamental way with his conscience. His defence lawyer, arguing in mitigation of sentence, said that in most Western democratic countries the responsibilities of suppressing domestic resistance is that of the police and not the army. The internal role of the SADF is exceptional and there has been widespread opposition to it. The fact that seven and a half thousand conscripts failed to report to duty in January this year is an indication of this opposition.

In considering sentence the military court stated that "Alan was a fine, outstanding young man who had an exemplary military record that could make a great contribution to society." On the other hand, military authority had to be obeyed and the views of the individual soldier had to be subordinate to those of the military.

The court felt that to sentence Alan to a period in detention barracks would be too harsh a penalty but to impose too light a sentence would encourage other soldiers to disobey orders. "We are standing with our backs to the wall and are fighting for our survival," said the Judge President, who also referred to the disinvestment campaign. He added, "The SADF is trying to maintain the lawful society and protect the lives and property of other citizens who have not the wherewithall to do so." The courts therefore felt obliged to impose the maximum fine of R600.

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