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The Call to End Conscription

Commission for Justice and Peace

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THE CALL TO END CONSCRIPTION

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SACBC statement 1985

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

SACBC statement 1985

★ We believe that a serious decision of this nature is a moral judgement and must be made after deep and prayerful examination of the facts available.

SACBC statement 1985

★ If you want peace, work for justice.

Pope Paul VI

★ We call on the government to amend the Defence Act.

SACBC statement 1985



★ The security forces are looked upon generally throughout Namibia as an "army of occupation."

SACBC Report on Namibia 1982

★ In this matter of conscientious objection we defend the right of every individual to follow his own conscience, the right therefore to conscientious objection on the grounds of universal pacifism and on the grounds that the person seriously believes the war to be unjust.

1977 statement

★ To defend white South African society by force of arms is to defend the policy of apartheid. To defend apartheid is to defend an unjust cause. It is not permissible for Christians to fight an unjust war.

Archbishop Hurley 1974

★ We also encourage Catholics to help promote peace by working for an end to conscription in whatever ways lie open to them.

SACBC statement 1985

Statement by the SA Catholic Bishops Conference explaining its call for an end to conscription

Our concern as Bishops in Southern Africa is for a speedy and just solution to the problems experienced by the people of RSA and Namibia, a solution in which all sectors of the population are called to play their part.

The situation

In our report on Namibia, issued in 1982, we drew your attention to the fact that the majority of Namibians regard the SADF as an army of occupation which is hindering the granting of independence to that country in terms of Resolution 435 of the UN Security Council.

During the unrest in the Vaal and East Rand townships in late 1984 the army was deployed in a support capacity to the SAP operating in those areas. This action was greeted with shock and horror by the inhabitants of those townships and by other South Africans concerned about how and where the army is deployed.

This use of the army to enforce "law and order" within the country has been further extended in 1985 to include the townships in the Eastern Cape, despite all the protests that the legitimate use of an army is in the defence of the country against

its enemies.

Many young men who are conscripted each year into the SADF are experiencing crises of conscience as they become aware of the role that they are being expected to play in the black townships, and elsewhere in RSA. As far back as 1977 in our statement "On Conscientious Objection" which we issued in our concern for the nature of the armed struggle and the escalating violence in Southern Africa, we defended the right of every individual to follow his own conscience; the right therefore to conscientious objection both on the grounds of universal pacificism and on the grounds that a person may seriously believe the war to be unjust.

We believe that a serious decision of this nature is a moral judgement and must be made after deep and prayerful examination of the facts available. In 1977 we urged the RSA government to make provision for alternative forms of non-military national service, as is found in other parts of the world. Sixty six countries do not have conscription. In 1983, in a letter to the Minister of Defence about the proposed Defence Amendment Act, Cardinal McCann, on our behalf, pointed out to the minister 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.

Our suggestion

Our suggested amendment was not included in the Defence Amendment Act. The situation in Southern Africa has continued to deteriorate and in 1985 we find ourselves in a situation of grave crisis.

We are concerned at the growing numbers of young men faced with a crisis of conscience caused by their conscription. The choices for them are:

- Serving in an army with whose mode of operation they cannot agree.
- Doing 6 years alternate service if they are recognised as religious pacifists.
- Serving a 6 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.

They are faced with these choices because of the system of compulsory conscription in RSA which does not prevail in most other countries around the world.

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. 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 ways lie open to them.



Cardinal Paulo Arns,

Archbishop of São Paulo

Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns — recognised internationally for his human rights campaign during the 20 years of military rule in Brazil — will be one of the key speakers at the ECC Festival.

Brazil was ruled by a military junta from 1964 to 1984, but the Cardinal sprang to prominence in 1971 — at the height of the wave of repression — when he called together all the priests of his archdiocese (the largest in the world) to discuss the issue of torture.

From this meeting came a strongly worded document which clearly defined the difference between social work and subversion and outlined the Church's position on social justice.

Since then the military have been extremely critical of Cardinal Arns, and during the last ten years he has suffered on many occasions from campaigns of vilification and active harassment.

Cardinal Arns remains undaunted, however. He has founded a newspaper, "O São Paulo", which became the largest Catholic paper in the country and during the days of Government censorship, was the only journal capable of reporting news on human rights in Brazil. The Government censored the newspaper and finally shut down Cardinal Arns's radio station which had been used for educational programmes. For a number of years, Cardinal Arns personally and through his position as Chairman of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese, continued to detail incidents of torture by the security forces.

Along with his co-Bishops in São Paulo, Cardinal Arns issued a pastoral letter entitled "Do not oppress your brother". In it he stated clearly that under the social teachings of the Church

it was unlawful to use physical, psychological or moral means of torture in the interrogation of suspects. He called on the government to implement the due process of the law.

To emphasise the seriousness of the Church's charges, Cardinal Arns and two million Catholics in São Paulo went on a twenty four hour fast. The military then began a direct campaign of attack against the Cardinal. His life was threatened and he was subjected to a defamation campaign. In December 1975, 3 000 priests and six bishops gathered in São Paulo to attend a Mass in support of the Cardinal.

From 1973, as well as his defence of human rights, Cardinal Arns began to work with the basic Christian communities which were to become one of the most exciting aspects of the Brazilian church and are today an example for the whole of Latin America. These basic Christian communities are small, tightly knit groups of people with similar incomes, education, problems and aspirations who work and live together, sharing material and spiritual resources in much the same way as the first Christians did. In Brazil, it is estimated there are 80 000 of these communities today. Cardinal Arns believes that through basic communities the poor can directly participate in improving their own situation.

Since 1980, Cardinal Arns has also become involved in the wider issues of injustice in Latin America and has been particularly associated with liberation theologians and others who are trying to find a peaceful way of transforming the unjust structures that exist within Brazil and other parts of Latin America.

STOP THE CALL-UP

PEACE FESTIVAL

On the weekend of 28 to 30 June, South Africa will witness its first ever Peace Festival. The festival will be at the University of the Witwatersrand and is being organised by the End Conscription Campaign.

This Festival of Peace will involve a wide range of

prominent South African and international personalities, including Bishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Beyers Naudé, Archbishop Denis Hurley and Cardinal Paul Arns of São Paulo, Brazil. The Festival aims to unite South Africans behind the call for a just peace in our land.

Highlights of the Festival programme

Public meetings

Friday 28 June 6.30pm: "World in Conflict: the Need for Peace." Speakers: Cardinal Arns, Dr Beyers Naudé, Mr Laurie Nathan.

Saturday 29 June 2pm: "International Struggle for Peace." A panel discussion with Cardinal Arns, Ms Carol Tongue (C.N.D. — U.K.), Bishop Tutu, Mr Richard Steele, Mr Murphy Morobe (UDF).

8pm: "Troops Out of Townships and Namibia." Speakers: Anton Lubowski (Namibian advocate), Mr Stone Sizane (UDF), Mr Paddy Kearney (Diakonia).

10pm – 2am: Peace Concert.

Sunday 30 June 11.00am: "Some Say No." Panel discussion with conscientious objectors.

2.30pm: Schools panel discussion with students from Black and White schools.

4.30pm: "The Way Forward." Public meeting. Speakers: Bishop Tutu, Mr Mike Evans, Ms Carol Tongue.

7.30pm: **Pray for Peace:** Church service at Wits led by Archbishop Denis Hurley.

For further information contact
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The declaration to end conscription

Towards a just peace in our land

We live in an unjust society where basic human rights are denied to the majority of the people.

We live in an unequal society where the land and wealth are owned by the minority.

We live in a society in a state of civil war, where brother is called on to fight brother.

We call for an end to conscription.

Young men are conscripted to maintain the illegal occupation of Namibia, and to wage unjust war against foreign countries.

Young men are conscripted to assist in the implementation and defence of apartheid policies.

Young men who refuse to serve are faced with the choice of a life of exile or a possible six years in prison.

We call for an end to conscription.

We believe that the financial cost of the war increases the poverty of our country, and that money should rather be used in the interests of peace.

We believe that the extension of conscription to Coloured and Indian youth will increase conflict and further divide our country.

We believe that it is the moral right of South Africans to exercise freedom of conscience and to choose not to serve in the SADF.

WE CALL FOR AN END TO CONSCRIPTION.

WE CALL FOR A JUST PEACE IN OUR LAND