

## DR IVAN TOMS

Convicted : Fourth of March 1988

For : Refusal to serve in the SADF

Sentence : 21 months imprisonment

“I refuse to serve in an army that defends apartheid, rather than the whole nation of South Africa. If the SADF was truly a defence force protecting the rights and property of all South Africans, then I would willingly serve.”

CONSCRIPTS  
NEED  
ALTERNATIVES  
Support  
Ivan Toms



In many respects Ivan Toms is like any other ordinary white South African. Born in Germiston, raised in Durban - where he captained his rugby team and was deputy headboy in an illustrious school career - Ivan eventually graduated as a medical doctor from the University of Cape Town in 1976.

From there it was into the army where he was commissioned to the rank of lieutenant. And like many of our young men in uniform, Ivan entered the SADF reluctantly.

It was not the sweat and drudgery of military life that concerned him. It was rather a deep rooted sense that it was wrong to serve in the SADF. His religious, moral and political convictions told him that the SADF was being used to defend apartheid. But the alternatives of leaving the country, living as a fugitive, or even facing the prospect of going to jail were too harsh to consider.

Now, after nine years of experiencing the harsh South African reality, Ivan calmly faces the possibility of up to thirty lonely months in prison. This is the punishment which confronts him if convicted for refusing to serve a one month camp in November.

“I, like many other young white men who love their country, find that I cannot ignore my conscience. I am prepared to go to jail for this stand,” says Ivan.

“The reality of the injustices in our country have convinced me of the impossibility of continuing with any form of service in the SADF.”

Ten years have passed since Ivan did his basics in the Medical Corps. Here he tells of some of the experiences he has had which have led him to the point of refusing to serve and possibly to go jail.

“I have served in the SADF as an officer, and these experiences have greatly influenced my decision to object.

“I was sent twice to the operational area and served on the Angolan border for six months. My contact with the Namibian people convinced me that they do not want the SADF in their country; international law says that South Africa has no right to be there. The local people feel that they are oppressed by an invading army. For them, curfews and security force harassment are the way of life in the SADF-imposed war zone.

“I have worked as a doctor for six years in Crossroads, and know that I am able to do real national service working with the poor and disenfranchised.

“In September 1983, Administration Board officials and police would come in, day in and day out, for three weeks, to demolish ‘illegal structures’. What this actually meant was that innocent people who had come from the homelands of Transkei and Ciskei

because there was no food or work there, were being attacked daily by these officials. Old women and babies were being left in the rain and cold of a Cape winter because, to the South African government, they should not have been in Cape Town. When the women held onto the flimsy branches that formed the base of their plastic shelters, this constituted a ‘riot’. Rubber bullets, teargas, snipe powder and police dogs battered the people into submission and we had to treat the casualties in the clinic.”

In June 1986 Crossroads was destroyed by “wildcat” conservative vigilantes with backup from the security forces. On 16 June the SADF took over the clinic where Ivan worked. “Now what had been a community clinic run by a Christian staff team was used by the SADF to try and win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the people. I don’t blame the National Servicemen who were forced to be part of this occupation of the clinic. Some of the doctors had actually worked in the clinic in their final year at UCT and were very unhappy about what they had to do. The blame must be directed at the SADF.”

“Since October 1984 troops have been used to control the black townships of South Africa and to suppress resistance to apartheid. The border is no longer thousands of miles away in Namibia, but right on our doorstep in Langa, Guguletu, KTC. Friends who might have gone to the same church school are now facing each other across the barrel of a gun in the townships. For most conscripts this is the first time they have entered a black township, and they drive in high up in a buffet with teargas, grenades, rifles - and with fear welling up within them.

“After working in the townships and developing real friendships with the people, I cannot believe that the children and youth being chased by patrolling buffets are the enemy.

“I really do believe that I have been doing true national service in my work in the poorest squatter areas of greater Cape Town. This is the kind of service that I believe will help to build a South Africa that we can all be proud of.”

Ivan's voice echoes the concern of many other conscripts. Some have publicly been prepared to declare their opposition to serving in the SADF. For others - no less sincere in their beliefs - it is families and friends who bear their frustrations. Conscripts are not the only victims of the law. An entire community has been caught up in a web of war and conscription in South Africa.

“I am one of many unhappy and unwilling conscripts who have to make very difficult choices,” says Ivan.

“While some refuse to serve, many simply find it impossible to do anything but go into the SADF reluctantly, angry that they are not given any realistic alternatives.

“I stand with all conscripts who support the End Conscription Campaign's call for constructive alternative national service.

“The law provides for community service only to conscripts who are both religious and pacifist. They are forced to do six years of service in a government structure.

“Constructive alternative service should be the same length as military service and be available to us in church, welfare and community organisations.

“To those conscripts who see no option but to go unwillingly into the SADF, the choice should be given not to serve in the townships or Namibia.

“I hope that my stand will contribute to the pressure on the government to introduce constructive alternative national service for all conscripts.

“I believe I must make a stand. I am committed to South Africa and believe that the truly patriotic action for me is to go to prison rather than deny my faith and my beliefs.

“South Africa is in a state of civil war and we have to take sides. I believe that the side of justice and truth is the side of the poor and disenfranchised in our country. I stand on that side.”



You can support Ivan and other conscripts by sending the following message to:

The Minister of Defence  
Box 47  
Cape Town  
8000

“I call on your government to change the law so that conscripts are given the option of doing constructive alternative National Service. This service should be the same length as military service and be available in church, welfare and community organisations. I also call for soldiers to be given the choice of not having to serve in the townships or Namibia.”

CONSCRIPTION • ADVICE • SERVICE  
For information about your legal rights or referral for professional counselling, call Durban 301-5663 or (Richard, Pietermaritzburg 944279) or (Mabel, Cape Town 650-2827) or (Lynette, Grahamstown 2223) or 409 001 (P.O. Box, Johannesburg 914-8106) or (P.O. Box, ...)

ISSUED BY THE END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN

Why I refuse  
to serve  
in the SADF



David Bruce

On trial

19 July Johannesburg

## DAVID BRUCE

Convicted : Twenty fifth of July 1988

For : Refusal to serve in the SADF

Sentence : 6 years imprisonment

“I would be willing to serve in an army which is involved in fighting for and defending all the people of this country. I am not prepared to serve in the defence of a racist political system.”