

PROGRAM TO ASSIST REFUGEES FROM  
THE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY

SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY REFUGEE AID FUND  
( S A M R A F )

## INTRODUCTION

The South African Military Refugee Aid Fund (SAMRAF) was established in early 1978 by a group of white South Africans who have been exiled from their country because of their resistance to apartheid (some at the risk of their lives) and by a number of Americans who have been prominent in the field of Southern Africa solidarity work.

Members of SAMRAF have worked both individually and organizationally for over two decades in support of the black liberation movement against the racist system in South Africa. Their activities have involved research, writing, publishing, lecturing, appearing on radio and TV, lobbying, demonstrating, testifying at United Nations and congressional hearings, and initiating boycotts and other campaigns to force American businesses to stop investing in South Africa. The membership of SAMRAF includes lawyers, clergy, writers, artists, organizers, and administrators of peace organizations.

Members of SAMRAF helped expose West Germany's strategic nuclear links with the South African government. In 1976 they worked with the United Church of Christ to publish The Oil Conspiracy, documenting the secret chain of companies through which Mobil Oil funneled oil to Rhodesia in violation of United Nations sanctions. The Oil Conspiracy received considerable publicity throughout Europe, the U.S. and Africa.

Economic pressure and exposés such as the Oil Conspiracy continue to be important strategies for those working in support of majority rule in South Africa, and such strategies are continuing under a multiplicity of organizations. One strategic point of pressure on South Africa, however, has been ignored by most anti-apartheid movements, and this is the South African military, and the role of progressive whites in South Africa.

The linchpin in the ability of white South Africa to hold out against increasing internal and external pressure rests with its military defence force. The South African Defence Force (SADF) has never been fully put to

the test on South African soil, but is known to be preparing for a state of war. No drastic change of government in this century has been successful without there having been a significant level of disloyalty among the dominant regime's military force.

To date, no other liberation support group has attempted to address the challenge of dissension within the South African military. As whites, some of whom themselves are deserters from the SADF, the South African members of SAMRAF are in a unique position to take up this challenge. Moreover, they are able to build upon the experience of other United States members of SAMRAF who were active in the Draft Resistance and GI Movement during the Vietnam war.

#### THE PROSPECTS FOR A MILITARY DESERTERS PROJECT.

What are the prospects for SAMRAF's project to assist dissension within the South African Defence Force? Already, there are a number of indications that the loyalty of a growing number of draft-age South Africans is questionable. Recently a draftee committed suicide on the eve of his conscription. An increasing number of South Africans are leaving the country or going underground to avoid the draft. In 1976, for example, 4,000 men failed to report for duty. There has been some publicity on the plight of dissenters who have fled to Botswana (see appendix 1), but thus far little is being done about the problem. Clearly the issue of dissension has been established, but its political significance has yet to be exploited. Moreover, those who in conscience can no longer support the military enforcement of apartheid have nowhere to turn for help.

The United Nations Commission set up at the World Conference for Action Against Apartheid in Lagos during August 1977 passed a resolution "....urging all states to grant immediate political asylum to bona fide war resisters and deserters from the Apartheid armed forces." Despite this

the prospects facing a military dissenter leaving South Africa are bleak. Many are reported to be hiding inside the country for this reason, with the prospects of heavy fines or imprisonment if found. An article in ECUNews highlights this situation (Bulletin of the South African Council of Churches, January 13, 1978 see appendix 2). It is difficult for dissenters to find countries willing to accept them at the present time. There are a number of draft resisters in Botswana at present, under extremely tenuous circumstances, with little prospect of any country accepting them as refugees.

WHY SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY REFUGEES SHOULD BE GRANTED ASYLUM IN THE USA.

The role of countries which state their opposition to apartheid should be clear. They need to abide by the Lagos recommendation and provide immediate political asylum to bona fide military dissenters. In reality, however, this will only happen through an intensive co-ordinated campaign and public pressure.

Currently, US law provides no grounds for political asylum based upon conscientious desertion from a foreign army. SAMRAF believes that soldiers who refuse to fight in the South African military should be treated as special cases and be granted political asylum and residency. The reasons for viewing a South African conscientious objector, deserter, or 'draft dodger' as a special case are as follows:

(A) A person who is called to serve in the South African military is required to fulfill tasks far beyond the normal role of a defence force.

For example- troops were sent in without consent to intervene in the sovereign state of Angola. Over 50,000 troops are illegally occupying Namibia in defiance of International law, uprooting people from their homes and creating fire-free zones. In terms of Namibia, troops refusing to serve there are abiding by international law. The USA recognises that South African troops are illegally occupying that country. Conscripts are used within South Africa to break strikes, disperse demonstrations and shoot protesting

school children. During the Sharpeville emergency, troops were used to crush political resistance by the black rural population.

(B) Alternative service for non-combat duty does not exist for South Africans. The penalties for refusing to do combat duties are heavy indeed. For those who desert it is 10 years in prison. Advocating conscientious objection could be punishable under section six of the Terrorism Act and punishable by death.

As the conflict escalates in South Africa the problem will intensify. Granting asylum to military refugees and dissenters is a concrete way of preventing increased bloodshed and furthering the cause of peace.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY REFUGEE AID FUND. (SAMRAF)

The following objectives have been adopted by the SAMRAF board for the next three years:

1. To generate a climate of public support at grass root level within the United States, for the idea of political asylum for SADF deserters and conscientious objectors.
2. To co-ordinate a campaign which will press the United States Government to grant asylum to South African military refugees, and thus establish the legal precedent in the USA for asylum.
3. To assist in whatever way possible in getting South African military refugees from South Africa or Botswana etc to the USA.
4. To provide legal counsel, material aid, and any other necessary assistance to help such refugees to establish themselves in exile (eg jobs, scholarships, medical aid etc).
5. To prepare material designed to educate the general public about the plight of South African military dissenters and the importance of assisting them in every way possible.
6. To encourage resistance within the SADF by generating publicity about

conscripts who have found asylum overseas which will be reported by the South African press.

7. To do research on the conditions surrounding the South African military and prepare educational material about the root causes of refugees fleeing their home country.

8. To strategise on ways to support actions undertaken by the progressive white community in South Africa.

SAMRAF will co-ordinate its efforts in the US with those of similar organizations being set up in Europe, Africa, Scandinavia, Canada and the United States. A steering committee, made up of representatives from each of the nationally based organisations, will co-ordinate the international efforts, while a staff person based in the U.S. will carry out the United States SAMRAF program designed above.

#### PROGRAM ACTIVITIES.

To establish a climate of support in the U.S. for political asylum for dissenters from the SADF, SAMRAF will publicise research now being done by SALSCOM on the South African military - its strength, the nature of its conscription, conditions of service, deployment strategies, dissension within its ranks etc. - and will take such findings before the U.N. and Congress as necessary.

One or two persons who have refused to be drafted or have deserted from the SADF for reasons of conscience will be itinerated around the U.S. in order to tell their story to church and community groups, university audiences and trade unions. SAMRAF will co-ordinate this campaign through Southern Africa solidarity groups, peace and human rights networks with which it has already been in conversation. As more dissenters from the SADF arrive in the U.S. they will be used to inform and educate interested communities about the current situation in South Africa.

SAMRAF will research and investigate immigration laws in order to determine the feasibility of bringing a test case for political asylum before the courts. If a person is located who wishes to be granted political asylum in the U.S. on the basis of desertion from the SADF, SAMRAF will generate public pressure and congressional support for such a case and will co-ordinate the securing of legal counsel if necessary.

One or more counseling centers or services for dissenters from the SADF who wish to settle in the U.S. will be set up to help them integrate into a new society by providing them with legal assistance, help with housing, jobs, schooling etc. Such services would also put them in touch with other South Africans, solidarity groups and dissenters in other countries.

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SAMRAF BUDGET FOR JUNE '78 to JUNE '79.

1. SALARIES

a) staff co-ordinator - full time	12,000
b) secretary - full time	8,000
c) SALSCOM consultant - part time	5,000
d) legal consultancy fees - part time	3,000
e) bookkeeper - part time	2,000
f) contingency (insurance, social security etc)	<u>3,000</u>
	33,000

2. OFFICE

a) rent @ \$300 a month	3,600
b) office supplies	400
c) printing & postage	2,000
d) telephone	<u>3,000</u>
	9,000

3. TRAVEL

a) SAMRAF staff	2,000
b) for draft resisters' speaking tours etc	5,000
c) International co-ordination with SALSCOM	<u>2,000</u>
	9,000

4. EDUCATION

a) subscriptions, newspapers, military magazines etc	1,800
b) research of published and unpublished material	1,200
c) publication and distribution of researched material	<u>2,000</u>
	5,000

5. RELIEF AID

a) for dissenters arriving in USA	<u>25,000</u>
	25,000

6. INTERNATIONAL CO-ORDINATION

a) contribution to assist and contract consultancies with other parallel and international organizations	<u>25,000</u>
	25,000

TOTAL 106,000

## APPENDIX 1

A COPY OF THE FULL TRANSCRIPT OF AN ARTICLE BY DAVID MARTIN  
WHICH APPEARED IN "THE OBSERVER" ON DECEMBER 18 1977  
(The article as published was severely edited)

LUSAKA 16 DECEMBER 1977

Large numbers of young South African men who are liable for two years military conscription including the possibility of combat service in Namibia are leaving their homeland to become draft dodgers, according to a group of them in the Botswana capital, Gaborone.

They estimate the numbers of draft dodgers in "hundreds". Most of them, they say, have gone to Europe on the pretext of further education. But few are likely to return while the call-up is still in force. At the same time a small flow of deserters is beginning.

One of the draft dodgers in Gaberone is John Coast, a 26-year-old Cape Town University graduate who arrived in Botsana by train at the end of November.

He was ordered to report to the Lions Head Commando on 7 October for three months service in Namibia where South African troops are fighting guerillas of the South West Africa Peoples Organization (SWAPO). Because of examinations his call-up was deferred until 1 December and four days before that he left South Africa for Botswana.

"I would not have left South Africa if I had not been called up," he said. "But I am not prepared to do active service especially in Namibia. One knows that the security forces are basically a suppressive force and that Namibia is an illegally occupied country."

In South African schools all white male citizens and non-citizens who have lived in the country for five years are registered for military service at the age of 16. Unless they are going on for further education they are liable for call-up at 17. Those who receive academic deferrals are monitored and if a three year course is not completed in five years the deferral ends.

Hitherto there has been virtually no publicity about South African draft dodgers and deserters. However in August the United Nations World Conference For Action Against Apartheid in Lagos passed a resolution urging member states to "grant immediate

political asylum to bona fide war resisters and deserters from the apartheid armed forces."

That clause attracted little attention and few member states appear to have considered its implications. The South African draft dodgers and deserters are encountering difficulties in finding countries willing to accept them as political refugees because they are white; and even Sweden which took in many American Vietnam War draft dodgers has proved unhelpful.

A South African deserter who arrived in Gaborone on 3 December says the United Nations told him they would give him a ticket to Europe if he could produce a letter saying Sweden or any other country accepted him. But the Swedish Mission in Gaborone declined.

Mr. Coast said he was treated with "antagonism" when he saw a diplomat in the British High Commission Consular Section in Gaborone. He says that the diplomat suggested he should return to South Africa, saying that nothing would happen to him - although he would certainly be imprisoned for refusing to do military service.

In Botswana there are at least a dozen draft dodgers and deserters waiting for countries to accept them. Two deserters have arrived this month. The bulk of the draft dodgers who have passports and can afford tickets are flying direct to Europe.

Mr. Graham de Smidt, a 26-year-old Cape Town teacher, became a draft dodger in July, also after receiving a three month call-up for service in Namibia. He tried to fly out from Johannesburg airport to Europe but his passport was seized. A few days later, with his wife, he walked across the border into Botswana.

He was also not prepared to fight in an illegal occupation army in Namibia. He sees the South African Army as a force to maintain the white regime, discrimination and privilege. "What is really taking place in South Africa is a civil war where it's South Africans fighting South Africans and I was not going to be part of that."

Even conscientious objectors are forced to serve in the army, Mr. de Smidt said, but at the discretion of the commanding officer need not carry arms. Members of religious orders like Seventh Day Adventists, Buddhists and Jehovah Witnesses are put into detention barracks. And homosexuals are kept in Ward 22 - the psychiatric unit - at Voortrekkerhoogte hospital in Pretoria.

One of the deserters in Gaborone, who was unwilling to be named

because he feared it would compromise his being admitted to another country, spent five months in the South African Army. He said he had initially intended to become a draft dodger but did not have the money for a ticket to Europe and he finally gave way to pressure from his family.

After basic training he was posted to the Directorate of Information Systems and Analysis (DISA) in Johannesburg. The unit's prime task was to compile a computerised system on all South African white males with the ultimate objective that identity and military numbers would be identical. Personal details such as religion, date of birth and next of kin were fed into the system.

The unit's secondary function was as the SOWETO TASK FORCE to be called in if the police were losing control. The deserter went absent without leave and crossed into Botswana after his unit was put on standby as a result of expected trouble in Soweto during December.

For this task the unit was given specialised training including the use of the "D Formation". This consisted of a formation of three platoons of sharpshooters on the outer perimeter of the D-shaped formation with a headquarters platoon in the centre.

The formation drew up 200 yards from a crowd and the commanding officer first warned them that it was an illegal assembly and gave them three minutes to disperse. If they failed to do so tear gas was fired. If this still failed, about five "ringleaders" were selected and identified by the commanding officer and a marksman was ordered to shoot them dead one at a time. Thereafter, if the crowd still did not disperse, the soldiers were ordered to put their weapons on automatic and fire at will into the crowd.

The deserter said that during his five months service he continually encountered "naked racism" and anti-semitism. "The attitude of officers and recruits alike was that blacks were just kaffirs and one lieutenant told a jewish recruit that he wished Hitler had killed all the Jews."

Political indoctrination lectures stressed that South Africa was fighting Communism and a lecturer told them that 75 per cent of South Africa's newspapers were owned by Communists. The lecturer said he knew this was true because he had been told so by the Chief of the Rhodesian Army.

The deserter never served in Soweto. But he says that during

training a Sergeant Major Koet told recruits that there had been reports in the press of a mass grave in Soweto after the June 1976 riots and official reports had put the death toll at around 160. The Sergeant Major said this was incorrect, that there had been eight mass graves and that the death toll was about 800.

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EXTRACTS FROM ADDENDUM

DAVID MARTIN, LUSAKA, 17 DECEMBER 1977

Draft dodger-deserter group called from Gaberone this morning resulting in some slight changes and additions.

Deserter had not wanted to be named becos he planned to emmigrate to Israel next week but that is now off and we can name him.....

..... Last week a representative of the American National Council of Churches suggested to the draft dodgers and deserters in Gaberone that there should be a permanent paid representative in the city.

Money could be raised for this purpose in the United States and draft dodgers and desrters would be encouraged to leave South Africa and helped with onward travel and support.

## APPENDIX 2

EcuNews Bulletin 1/1978

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### SECTION II : THE LOCAL CHURCH IN ACTION

#### PARISH MINISTER CALLS FOR PRAYERS FOR MAN IN DETENTION

JOHANNESBURG - The outspoken Presbyterian minister of St Anthony's Church in Vrededorp, Johannesburg, the Rev Rob Robertson, has urged his parish to pray for fellow parishioner Mr Anton Eberhard, who is at present serving a sentence in detention barracks in Pretoria for having refused a three month military call-up.

Mr Robertson makes his appeal in his latest newsletter in which he reveals that Mr Eberhard, a leading member of his church, was sentenced on December 14 last year to 12 months in detention barracks, ten months of which has been suspended for five years.

Mr Robertson writes that Mr Eberhard had not tried to dodge the issues involved in refusing military call-up.

"Two moral issues are involved. There is the question for the Christian as to whether he can purposely kill other people in certain circumstances.

"The pacifist believes that even if his own and others lives are endangered, he may not do that. Quakers and Jehovah's Witnesses hold this view.

"Other churches which are not pacifist, still generally teach that war must be for a just cause and waged in a just manner, and this involves another moral decision for everyone who is called up".

While acknowledging that the Defence Act allows for those who have conscientious objections on any of these grounds to do non-combatant military service, (still under military command), Mr Robertson points out that no alternative non-combatant military service is at present allowed in South Africa. The only option, therefore, is to serve a sentence in detention or to leave the country.

"Anton's witness is a plea for this kind of alternative, rather than that the State compels everyone into its armed forces. At the same time, while in detention, he will be witnessing for Christ to the other chaps with him, some of whom are there for criminal behaviour and others of whom are Jehovah's Witnesses.

"Please pray for Anton and also pray for other young men who have decided to serve in the armed forces and are away from their families at this time".

## APPENDIX 3.

### MEMORANDUM ON SOUTH AFRICAN LAW

#### RE MILITARY SERVICE

Compulsory Military Service is provided for in the Defense Act (No. 44 of 1957).

Compulsory Service does not apply to females or to non-whites (defined as "persons who are not white persons as defined in Section One of the Population Registration Act, 1950") but by proclamation any provision of the Act (including compulsory service) can be applied to them.

All white males must register when 17, and are liable for compulsory training and service until age 65. (Section 9).

There is no right of conscientious objection, the only provision being one which states that a registration officer may assign someone who belongs to a recognized religious denomination which is opposed to all forms of armed conflict to non-combatant duties. (Section 67 (3)). Penalties under the Act range from 2 years imprisonment to 10 years imprisonment, the latter being the penalty for desertion while on duty. Under Section 121 it is an offense to induce anyone to act in conflict with their military duties or to neglect service. The penalty here is up to 6 years imprisonment (Section 121). For refusal to serve the minimum penalty is 12 months imprisonment.

2.

Under amendments to the original Act mobilization can be ordered not only for service in time of war, but also for service "in the prevention or suppression of terrorism or in the prevention or suppression of internal disorder in the Republic." (Section 92) . Also under the Defense Amendment Act of 1967 all provisions operate in "South West Africa including the Eastern Caprivi Zip**Vel**".

It should be noted that the terms "terrorism" and "internal disorder" are used by the South African authorities in characterizing dissident black organization and anti-apartheid movements. The Defense Act is thus/political a statute and an important component of the overall repressive legal system.



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NEW YORK

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