

Special Hearing:

Compulsory Military Service (Conscription)

• PURPOSE OF THE HEARING

- 1 The broad purpose of the special hearing on compulsory military service (also known as the 'national service system' or 'conscription')¹ was expressed by Archbishop Tutu as follows:

The Commission is required by law to investigate all aspects of the conflicts of the past which gave rise to gross violations of human rights and to consider the perspectives and motives of the various participants within that conflict.

We know that there have been different points of view about the sensitive issue of conscription and strong views expressed for and against the old SADF [South African Defence Force]. Some held very firmly to the view that South Africa was facing a total onslaught from the Communist empire and its surrogates, and believed that they were constrained to defend South Africa against what they perceived as an atheistic, unchristian foe. Others believed, equally vehemently, that the enemy was not out there; that the border was here in our midst, that certain things happened in waging wars that were thought to be totally necessary - things that must make us all hang our heads in shame.

This issue, like so many in our apartheid past, divided our nation. We want to know as much as possible about the truth from all perspectives so that we, as a Commission, can suggest ways in which a divided and traumatised nation may be healed and make recommendations on how to ensure that the mistakes of the past (made on all sides) are never repeated.

- 2 More specifically, the objective of the special hearing was to:
 - a provide an opportunity for those who suffered, and continue to suffer from their experiences as conscripts, to share their pain and reflect on their experiences;
 - b explore the range of experiences of those affected by conscription. Included amongst these were those who opposed conscription and those who believed they were fulfilling their duty – those who fought on the border, servicemen who participated in township policing, those who were part of the citizens' force and those who served as conscripts in the South African Police (SAP). It included those who went into exile to avoid

conscription, those who opposed it at home, and the experiences of families who suffered as the result of the traumatising of their husbands, sons, or friends;

- c raise public awareness about the reality and effects of post-traumatic stress disorder;
- d develop recommendations on rehabilitation and reconciliation arising out of these experiences.

- 3 In a press statement calling for submissions from ex-conscripts in the South African Defence Force (SADF), the Commission emphasised that the hearing was “neither an attempt to look for perpetrators, nor a process that will lead to the awarding of victim status”, as defined by the Act governing the Commission.

• PREPARATION

- 4 The special hearing on conscription was the subject of intense debates within the Commission and the product of sensitive and careful planning that involved consultation with various groups, both inside and outside of government. For example, in addition to the general call for submissions through the media, the Commission exchanged correspondence with the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in an attempt to involve people from within the former defence force.² The programme of the day was also designed in such a way as to reflect a diversity of views, beginning with a broad overview of the social and political context of compulsory military service in order to provide a background to individual testimonies. The hearing closed with an inclusive focus on the way forward.
- 5 Yet, despite attempts to cater for the widest possible divergence of views, most individual testimonies submitted to the Commission were critical of conscription and the SADF. Because of this, the Commission was accused of bias.³

• THE CONTEXT

Social and political context

- 6 Drawing on a number of extensive studies of the opinions of white students during the 1980s, Mr Jannie Gagiano of the Department of Political Science, University of Stellenbosch, painted a statistical picture of what he called the “closed socialisation environment” and “the mindset of the typical white conscript”.⁴ He noted that, when the last survey was done in June 1989, the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the African National Congress (ANC) had less than 5 per cent support in white student ranks. Amongst Afrikaans-speaking students, some 25 per cent supported right wing parties, 60 per cent supported the National Party (NP) and 15 per cent supported the Democratic Party (DP). Amongst English speaking students, the same parties received, respectively, around 1 per cent, 18 per cent and 70 per cent of support.
- 7 The high level of ‘encapsulation’, of living in ‘a sort of cocoon’, is illustrated by figures which showed that less than 13 per cent of Afrikaans students read any English newspapers and less than 10 per cent of English speakers read anything printed in Afrikaans. An even smaller percentage, in either group, read newspapers that were more

sympathetic to the liberation movements. The highest reported frequency of any form of political discussion or contact with black students was 8 per cent.

- 8 The 1989 survey also showed a 60 per cent level of support for what the state and its central institutions stood for and wanted to preserve at that time (about 75 per cent among Afrikaans-speaking students and 52 per cent among English-speaking students). Sixty per cent of students who said they were members of the opposition DP expressed support for repressive action taken by the state against the protest initiatives of the ANC or the UDF. This figure rose to the high eighties amongst Afrikaans-speaking white students.
- 9 As far as attitudes to conscription and the refusal to do military service were concerned, around 85 per cent of Afrikaner male students and 55 per cent of English-speaking students said that they would never refuse to do military service as a form of political protest. Mr Gagiano also referred to high figures that show that, in 1989, a large majority of white students in South Africa still viewed Communism as a very serious threat.
- 10 Professor Annette Seegers of the Department of Political Science, University of Cape Town, drew the attention of the Commission to a number of questions which, in her view, still needed to be explored if the “socially pervasive influence” of the national service system in the white community was to be fully understood. She distinguished between:
 - a factors that influenced people before they entered national service, such as the attitudes of parents and the roles of employers and high schools (specifically the imitation of military service through the cadet system);
 - b experiences during national service, and
 - c experiences after national service, such as (in her view) cynicism about public institutions and greater solidarity between Afrikaans and English-speaking people.
- 11 She emphasised that white men remained involved in the military for a large part of their lives, a point illustrated by this quotation from an earlier analysis⁵:

The relationship between part-time and full-time forces can best be understood in terms of the typical Defence Force career of a white male. All white men must register for military service at sixteen, while still at school. They are then liable for service in the full-time force. Those who do not make a career in the permanent force are required either before or after tertiary education to render two years of national service in one of the five arms of the Defence Force. After this they are placed in the part-time citizen force for twelve years, during which time they must serve up to 720 days in annual thirty-, sixty-, or ninety-day ‘camps’. Then they are placed in the active citizen force reserve for five years and may be required to serve twelve days a year in a local commando until the age of fifty-five. Finally, they are placed on the national reserve until they are sixty-five.

- 12 Professor Seegers also drew attention to the very large numbers of white men who were involved in the national service system. The average number of people who reported for the annual intake of conscripts was approximately 22

000. From 1960 until it was scrapped, approximately 428 774 people reported for compulsory military service.⁶ (See appendix 2 for details).

- 13 A psychologist whose clients include ex-SADF conscripts echoed these views. In a written submission to the Commission, Ms Trudy de Ridder of the Trauma Centre for the Victims of Violence and Torture, Cape Town, reported that:

Most ex-conscripts report that they, their peers and their community saw service in the SADF as a natural part of growing up and 'becoming a man'... The national education system consistently presented military training as a given part of the rites of passage of white men and the moral duty of anyone concerned with defending order and morality (Christianity) against the forces of evil and chaos (Soviet-inspired Communism)...

My recent experience with ex-conscripts has been characterised by their insistence that they could not have had the tools or information to challenge this view - especially at the age of seventeen or eighteen. Most report that, once in the SADF, resistance to the fact of conscription, the chain of command or the politico-military objectives was unthinkable. In fact, most still associate their military experiences with a sense of pride - in their capacity for physical and psychological endurance...

- 14 At the Commission's special hearing on children and youth in Johannesburg on 12 June 1997, this perspective was clearly expressed by Mr Christo Uys, a council member of a prominent Afrikaner youth organisation, the *Junior Rapportryers Beweging* (JRB):

We were born in the struggle. The war on the border was in the process and within South Africa there was a freedom struggle. Today it is seen as a very just struggle, but the effect thereof wasn't always as just. And this was the struggle that we fought in the police and in the army. We did our service and those of us who weren't in the police or did our national service; we prepared ourselves at school and university to play an active role in the economy of South Africa.

Sometimes it is often overlooked and forgotten that we also played a role in the struggle against Communism; today it is seen to be ludicrous but we believed that we did play a positive role there.

And in essence, our struggle was against anarchy. Today we listened how anarchy was prevalent in black communities - how it affected people's lives. There were references made to kangaroo courts, necklacing. This also affected us.

As a national serviceman in the army, I believed and I was sure that I contributed to keep people's lives safe. We also heard a lot of different atrocities that took place and the moment that an Afrikaner says it, it is not believed. But you know that, while I was in the army, I didn't talk to people or receive commands or instructions that led to the violation of human rights.

The fact that we today have the infrastructure in this country that is the best in Africa, the fact that we have the potential to grow economically, that to me is proof that we succeeded in making a great contribution towards a peaceful transition in South Africa.

You know democracy is a wonderful thing, but you cannot eat it and it doesn't keep you warm in winter. If in South Africa there was a [very hasty] transfer to a new democracy in South Africa, we could also have awoken today in Bosnia...

As young Afrikaners, we are proud of our cultural heritage and we are proud of the role that we play in this country. And we believe that our struggle was imbedded in core values that we learnt in our families and our struggle will come to the fore every time these values are endangered.

- 15 Individual testimony at the hearing on conscription also provided a window on the ways in which white society as a whole either supported or failed to take issue with the national service system. Professor Johan Hattingh, who also gave testimony as an ex-captain in the Citizen Force, read from a letter his mother wrote to him when she heard that he was preparing a submission to the Commission:

Johan, a perspective relating to the Defence Force of which the Truth Commission will never hear is, [first], the role which parents of soldiers played. Despite parents' serious concerns and anger regarding what was happening to their sons, they had to remain positive to be able to assist their sons, come what may. Secondly, the women in South Africa (white women) became active and started rendering services - these were the Defence Force women, the Southern Cross Fund and the church women. We collected money to furnish in a cosy way coffee bars where soldiers could relax; we bought furniture, etc. There was also money collected for rooms of prayer, for various bits and pieces of furniture and games, etc. We corresponded with soldiers and we assisted families of soldiers locally. We sent parcels with biscuits to all the army bases [she adds with some humour that she later heard that there was such a flood of biscuits that the soldiers began pelting each other with them!].

Religious context: a perspective on the role of the church and the chaplaincy

- 16 The Reverend Neels du Plooy was a chaplain in the SADF between 1977 and 1990. From 1979, he was public relations officer to the Chaplain General and Senior Staff Officer: Publications. His submission to the Commission prompted the following questions:
- a Why did the overwhelming majority of healthy, young and motivated South African white males of good standing, Afrikaans and English-speaking, unconditionally do national service - and more even than that, look forward to it?
 - b Why did parents accept national service as a necessity and a general way of life?
 - c Why did young people having difficulties at school suddenly see national service as a very good cause and a very good reason to quit school the moment they became eighteen?

- c Why did parents feel obliged to inspire young men with problems at home or at school to join national service in the hope that disciplined training, etc. would do them good?

- 17 Drawing on his extensive personal experience, the Reverend Du Plooy focused on the role of the Church and, in particular, the chaplaincy in “bringing about this positive attitude”.⁷ While acknowledging that chaplains “did have the freedom to preach the gospel according to their convictions,” and that they played a “vital role ... especially in conveying death messages to service men as well as parents”, he said that his main concern was the “unholy marriage between the church and the state”:
- 18 In order to understand the role of the military chaplain and the national servicemen chaplains in the SADF, one needs to keep in mind that, especially as far as the mainstream Afrikaans churches were concerned, the church at national synod level co-operated fully with the SADF on issues of military and national service. The church accepted the advice of the leadership of the NP government and Defence Council as far as defence matters were concerned.

This total involvement, and this [is what makes one] ‘heartsore’, was strengthened by the infamous concept of the total onslaught. Through the idea of the total onslaught, the church immediately became an ally in the war. The total onslaught concept assumed that only 20 per cent of the onslaught was of a military nature and the other 80 per cent directed against the economical and spiritual welfare of the people. Therefore the chaplaincy and the church had to be involved in winning the hearts and the minds of the people.

The Church’s main task was to strengthen the spiritual defensibility of its members. The Church was now totally convinced [of] the fact that we were fighting the war ... we were fighting a just war. Almost every synod of the Dutch Reformed Church during this time supported the military effort in their prayers and by way of resolutions of thanks. They acknowledged the fact that the SADF helped to constitute a safer living environment for the peoples of South Africa and serving church members in the SADF...

Chaplains - in the citizen force, commandos and permanent force - had a special task to keep civilian congregations informed. They delivered sermons and addresses to these congregations to console parents as to the special care their sons [were receiving] during national service. Special efforts were made to call on the girlfriends of national servicemen to be positive about the war, because it was for their safety and future that the boyfriend was doing military service. Chaplains even gave guidelines to girlfriends on how they should write their letters to the men on the border or in the townships. For example, [they were told] “never write or talk about problems at home...”

- 19 Another striking illustration of this ‘unholy marriage’ between church and state was the issue to each soldier of a special edition of the New Testament and Psalms. Bound into the front of this special edition was a message from Mr PW Botha, first as Minister of Defence and later as State President, which read: “This Bible is the most important part of your military equipment...” The Reverend Du Plooy noted “that we eventually in 1989 succeeded in having the message of PW Botha inserted as a loose leaflet and not bound in anymore.”

The Committee on South African War Resistance and the End Conscription Campaign

- 20 Mr Roger Field provided a brief input on the Committee on South African War Resistance (COSAWR), an organisation of exiled conscientious objectors, formed in the aftermath of South Africa's invasion of Angola in 1975 and the Soweto uprising the following year. Its aim was to raise international awareness about the role of the SADF and to provide support to objectors in exile. Mr Field, who worked for COSAWR between May 1985 and December 1989, emphasised that:

exile was the most important decision and, I think, often the most traumatic experience of [these resisters'] lives and its long-term effects should not be underestimated.

- 21 He also presented the Commission with a book "which contains the distillation of analyses by COSAWR and resisters of the SADF and its occupation of Namibia, its war against the frontline states and its war against the people of South Africa."⁸

- 22 Dr Laurie Nathan was a founding member of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) in 1983, ECC national organiser in 1985 and 1986, and is currently director of the Centre for Conflict Resolution at the University of Cape Town. He made a submission on the background to and objectives of the ECC. The ECC Declaration read as follows:

The Declaration is headed towards a just peace in our land, a Declaration to end conscription. 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 costs of the war increase the poverty of our country and that money should be used rather 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.

- 23 Dr Nathan described the ECC as a broad, dynamic and creative coalition.

We had within our ranks English and Afrikaans-speaking people; we had school pupils, university students and parents. Some of us regarded ourselves as liberals; others as radicals, Marxists, pacifists, Christians, humanists. We had rock musicians, poets, artists ... All of these different sectors were able, through the ECC, to campaign against conscription in a way that they felt comfortable [with].

- 24 He noted that, because of the significance of the ECC's objectives and the high profile nature of its campaigns, its efforts were met with extensive state repression.

We were subjected to merciless vilification, the thrust of which was that we were traitors, cowards, 'mommy's boys' (as Magnus Malan once put it); that we were in bed with Communists and that we were part of the revolutionary onslaught against South Africa.

- 25 In 1988, following a successful court action against the defence force and a stand made by 143 conscripts who collectively announced their refusal to serve, the ECC was formally banned and became operative again only after the unbanning of the ANC and other political organisations.

● INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES

- 26 As is the case with other individual testimonies before the Commission, it is impossible to capture the complexity and richness of the various oral and written individual submissions on compulsory military service. This section provides only an illustration of the wide divergence of mainly negative experiences brought to the attention of the Commission.

Conscientious objectors

- 27 In his testimony to the Commission, Dr Ivan Toms made a useful distinction between what he described as 'two waves' of conscientious objectors. The 'first wave' began in the mid-1970s, when objections to conscription and the SADF were based primarily on religious grounds. The 'second wave' of objectors was linked to the ECC in the 1980s, and its objections were more explicitly political. The Commission heard testimonies from Mr Peter Moll and Mr Richard Steele, who represented the first wave, and from Dr Ivan Toms and Dr Laurie Nathan, who formed part of the second wave. The following extracts illustrate these points of view:

- 28 Mr Peter Moll said:

I became a conscientious objector in July 1976 at a conference held by the Students Christian Association on the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus. It was pointed out by Michael Cassidy of Africa Enterprise that the guerrillas of the ANC and SWAPO were young men like myself who wanted justice and an end to apartheid; thus the SADF was not fighting a foreign aggressor but was engaged in a civil war. The message struck home. I decided that it was no longer possible for me to go to military camps or to prepare for action in Namibia.

My motive was based upon general moral reasoning and Christian theological ethics. I was not a pacifist, although I had and still have great respect for pacifists. My objection was to the unjust nature of the war being conducted by the SADF inasmuch as it was in defence of white supremacy under the guise of protecting Christianity from Communism.

- 29 Dr Ivan Toms said:

I started this clinic in Crossroads from nothing. We built it with builder's rubble ... and some of my friends from the End Conscription Campaign started to help us. There, experientially, one saw what apartheid was all about.

So my resistance to apartheid and to the army was not something from a book or from some intellectual view of life; it was experiential.

Perhaps just to raise one specific experience that led me to publicly refuse to serve in the SADF. In September 1983, we had a situation where many women and children came down to join their husbands in Crossroads. It was not a political thing; it was about being part of a family. And they were making these little structures of branches that they cut from the forests with black plastic over them. As we all know, September is the Cape Town winter so it was raining a lot. And for three weeks, day in and day out, the security forces - the riot police - came in their Casspirs [armoured personnel carriers]. They'd bring camouflaged Casspirs and, in their dark green, light green camouflage uniforms, [would] rip down these structures, pull the plastics and branches to a spot and burn them in front of everybody...

Then one Friday, after three weeks of this, some of the women held on to the branches and to the riot police that constituted a riot. And they used teargas, rubber bullets (which, I don't know if you know, are six inches long and about an inch and a half in diameter of solid rubber) and police dogs to quell the riot, and we were having to treat the results of that. So we had kids with severe respiratory distress from the teargas, people with dog bites. I remember one time having to go out and see a mother who had a twenty-four hour old baby that was left in the rain because her structure had been torn down.

And a reporter asked me, "Does this make any difference to you"? I said...in no ways could I from that point on ever put on that SADF uniform again. Because you see, to the kids and to the people in Crossroads, those riot police in camouflage uniforms were the Amajoni; they were the soldiers. And to put on that uniform would be to identify with those Amajoni who had actually been oppressing the very community that I served.

Some individual submissions

Pastor Craig Botha, former radio operator and diver in the South African Navy

- 30 Pastor Craig Botha was a seventeen-year-old conscript in the SADF serving in Bloemfontein in 1978. After his basic training, he decided to join the navy because he did not want to serve on the border. He remained a member of the permanent forces for four and a half years and was deployed, first as a radio operator and later as a diver, on a strike craft based at Salisbury Island in Durban. He participated in various military activities in neighbouring countries.

Our mission was to launch these inflatable craft with these highly trained reconnaissance commandos on board into the water off various strategic points, [whereupon] the commandos would go ashore and they would blow up installations and generally cause havoc. And then they would escape via the sea back to our waiting strike craft and we would leave the area at high speed.

So during the time I served on these attack vessels, we performed a number of operations of which we were instructed to keep secret our destination and operation. Often we were going to sea for a period of time and were not told our destination before departure. On a number of occasions, we were visited by a number of high

ranking defence force personnel who wished us well and spoke to us about the importance of our mission and what we were doing to protect the country from a total onslaught, etc...

I was very politically naive and it was only later that I realised what a lie I had been involved in. As I look back on this period, it is with deep shame and regret that I took part in these acts of sabotage and violent destabilisation. The struggles that our neighbouring states have had to undergo, even to this time, is partially attributable to these missions.

- 31 However, Pastor Botha devoted most of his testimony to talking about his conversion to Christianity and the various reconciliation projects in which he and his congregation are currently involved.⁹

Mr Ian Liebenberg, former non-commissioned officer and platoon commander on the Namibian/SWA Border

- 32 Mr Liebenberg, socialised as a typical white, Afrikaans-speaking male during the 1970s, described his training as an infantryman and the difficulties he experienced coping with his role as the eighteen year old commander of a platoon of thirty people, most of whom had an education below standard eight (grade ten). In his testimony he stated that:

What most of us were getting both disillusioned with, tired of and what I think, in a very real sense, moulded our moral decision - making a choice for a new future and for transformation of society - was, I think, the feeling that these politicians and political generals directed and dictated politics and war from Tuynhuis and the Union Buildings. And that in many cases, especially the politicians, had no personal experience of war and its impact on humans, the land and nature. Not to mention the individual or collective human psyche.

- 33 He went on to ask:

What about those people in the existential vacuum from both sides that are now left with [the problem of] trying to figure out where to go? The change of government doesn't necessarily provide you with a job or resolve the problems you have as a result of a long history of alienation.

Mr Tim Ledgerwood, a former conscript

- 34 Mr Ledgerwood had a privileged upbringing in a white, English-speaking, middle class and deeply religious home. He said that:

The society that I grew up in asked no questions about military duty (this was in 1980). You went to school, you registered when you were sixteen, you went off and did your national service, you came home and life carried on as normal. Your girlfriend was proud to have somebody who was on the border, and the war was far, far away. None of us had ever been to Namibia.

- 35 Mr Ledgerwood started his national service in January 1980, with the Second South African Infantry Battalion in Walvis Bay. He described his growing disillusionment, first becoming a conscientious non-combatant and eventually,

towards the end of his second year, going AWOL (absent without leave) with the intention of joining the ANC's military wing.

Being young, foolish, unprepared and on my own, I was caught as I was about to climb over the border fence at Ramatlabana. It was then that the nightmare began. I was handed over to the Zeerust branch of the security police who interrogated me for about two weeks or so. I can remember very few details except the screaming. I was nineteen years old at the time. The dark nights of my soul had begun...

- 36 He was later handed back to the military police and eventually sentenced to six months detention.

My life after that was substantially and subtly different. I found myself emotionally exhausted for years afterwards - I'm talking twelve years afterwards. My sense of dissociation and alienation was acute. Before the Commission, I'd never met anybody who'd been through even remotely similar experiences to these, except for one guy who is now my best friend, a guy who spent his time instructing UNITA in Angola and had gone through some quite harsh things.

Professor Johan Hattingh, former captain in the Citizen Force, Stellenbosch Commando

- 37 Professor Hattingh, currently a professor of philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch, did his initial one-year of training as an infantry soldier in 1973. The rest of his national service was completed as part of the regiment of the University of Stellenbosch and, from the beginning of the 1980s, as a member of the Stellenbosch Commando. He described his gradual shift from whole-hearted support for and full co-operation with the national service system in 1973, through disillusionment with the University of Stellenbosch regiment, to his reluctant participation in and passive resistance to the militarisation of his home town and his professional and private life.

We then had the opportunity to apply to be transferred to Stellenbosch Commando and we thought that would be better. We would not be transferred to border duty far away; we would be in our own home town. But that turned out to be more stressful as it were because, in a sense, we were now in military uniform walking around in our own home town, in our own backyard. We were in the public eye of our friends and family...

Besides Saturday mornings spent away on shooting practices, during the mid-1980s, there were lots and lots of twenty-four hour standbys we were put on. There were roadblocks and you had to do duty over and over again. At that stage, Stellenbosch Commando was an all-white commando and the perception of the enemy was that it [consisted of] people on the other side of the colour line.

Mr John Deegan, conscript in the SAP and former member of Koevoet

- 38 Mr Deegan gave detailed testimony to the Commission about his initial involvement with the Security Police and his subsequent life in the early to mid-1980s as a "Koevoet killer", a member of a notorious SAP counter-insurgency unit on the Namibian border. His life vividly illustrates the continuing, destructive psychological toll of these activities on him and those around him.¹⁰

Mr Sam Sole, former conscript in the townships

- 39 Mr Sole submitted a first hand account of the experiences of a SADF soldier/ national serviceman in the townships of the Eastern Cape.¹¹
- 40 Mr Sam Sole portrays the staggering gulf between the official instructions (“as members of a disciplined, effective and respectful security force each individual’s conduct must at all times be responsible and courteous”)¹² and the daily and nightly behaviour of the white troops and the police in the townships. For example:

One night ... we are hanging around and suddenly one stone smashes the windscreen of an SAP bakkie and two cops with shotguns bound off like dogs let off the leash. They stalk the one lone stone thrower and corner him. He continues his desperate barrage and they shoot him dead. He’s about sixteen; he was a kid.

- 41 Mr Sole also tried to describe his own reaction to the “insane situation” in which he found himself :

My own guilt at my inaction in the face of this brutality, as well as the sheer physical impact of it, created an enormous tension and conflict of behaviour. My response was enough to get me labelled a ‘Kaffir boetie’ and a ‘Kommunis’, yet it is impossible to isolate yourself completely. You have been living fart to fart with these people for nine months. They have humanity although they abuse it in others and you have to continue to live with them. So you are forced to compromise yourself and, treacherously, you lose that sense of outrage until the next time.

Mr Eric Rautenbach, who opted for exile rather than conscription

- 42 Writing from Canada, Mr Rautenbach told the Commission how he escaped conscription by leaving the country.

The people I went to school with and my other white friends and acquaintances all went one by one to do their military service. One couldn’t really blame them - how do you go against such a big machine? You have nowhere to hide, nowhere to run. ... I made the decision eventually to break the law ... to finance a ticket out ... I lived and scavenged through fourteen countries. I was getting tired. It was a confusing time. I was sick and I’d lost faith in humanity. I had no country, no visas, no work permits, no future and no food. I stole food to eat. I was truly homeless even more than the homeless of South Africa [were]. I had no tribe, nothing. I trusted nobody.

Round and round I went, using my white skin to blend in with the university students, the vacationers and young travellers from South Africa, Canada, Australia and Europe ...

I finally returned for a brief visit to South Africa this year, twenty-one years after leaving, to take my father’s ashes to the mountain ... Every day my soul cries for home, but home is not home anymore.

Value of individual submissions

- 43 These individual submissions highlighted a number of important points.

- 44 First, they provided glimpses of the different ways in which some white men struggled with the issue of compulsory military service. These included those who objected on religious and/or political grounds and were imprisoned; those who went into exile; those who openly mobilised opposition to conscription; those who participated reluctantly and opted for a more passive style of resistance, and those who tried to join the military 'enemies' of the previous state.
- 45 Some of the submissions focused on military activities in neighbouring countries, especially in South Africa's 'fifth province', Namibia. This highlighted the fact that there are large numbers of victims in the southern African region whose stories were not addressed by the Commission.
- 46 Many of these individual testimonies helped to achieve one of the purposes of the special hearing, namely to draw attention to the reality of post-traumatic stress disorder and to the urgent, deep challenge of dealing with the psychological consequences of past conflicts. In the words of Commissioner Wendy Orr, who spoke after Mr John Deegan had completed his testimony:

John, it's very difficult to respond to a testimony like yours. It engenders so many feelings in all of us. In me, it engenders feelings of horror, of pain, of anger but I think, most overwhelmingly, of sorrow that young men like you - and not only those that were in the SADF but those who were in MK and APLA and other forces - that young men like you had to deal with that insanity [of the war] ... We're going to need to deal with the issues and challenges that you have raised to-day ... I remind you that this is not the end as you yourself know. There's still a long way to go, and we wish you every support and courage and affirmation in that journey.

• THE REALITY AND CHALLENGE OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

- 47 In an oral submission by a psychologist, Mr Gary Koen, and in the written submission by Ms Trudy de Ridder, a number of the common symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder were highlighted. These include recurrent nightmares, anxiety about and feeling tainted by death, insomnia, heightened aggression, social withdrawal, substance abuse, difficulties in interpersonal relationships and generalised distrust of others.¹³ Mr Koen emphasised that these symptoms can result from a range of events, such as a single episode of life-threatening harm and violence (for example rape and assault). In his submission he focused on war-related incidents, in particular those linked to guerrilla warfare:

Guerrilla warfare, the type of war fought on the South African borders for the past twenty years, contains many unique features not seen in conventional warfare. These include hit and run tactics, surprise ambushes, extensive use of landmines and booby traps, as well as the stress experienced by people who are primarily town dwellers fighting a bush war. Unpredictability characterises this type of environment and the uncertainty of either attack or safety leads to a high level of anxiety and hyper-arousal in anticipation of the next attack.

Whilst the majority of the South African troops were not involved in actual fire fighting, a significant number were exposed to the conditions exposed above. It is these soldiers who have been most likely to suffer the effects of such stress.

- 48 As an illustration of what it means to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, he described the therapy he conducted with a member of the medical corps in the operational area:

S. would often chastise himself for having let others die or even accuse himself of having killed them. His guilt seemed not only irrational but also completely unfair.

Certainly the most painful moment in the whole treatment occurred when he lamented the death of the child, the child who died in his arms, and perhaps the most brutal moment occurred when he smashed his fist into his own face, blaming himself for having caused the child's death. The contrast between the two experiences was marked.

The first experience evoked an entirely human reaction, the pain of all those who died becoming sensed around this experience of a solitary child's death. There is nothing more vulnerable and in need of protection than a child, and there is little else that shows up the barbaric nature and violence of war than when a child is killed. S. accessed this awareness in the most painful way; his grief was shy of the most profound despair.

Simultaneously, this experience gave rise to the most abusive and seemingly inexplicable guilt and self-condemnation. In this instance, what required recognition, understanding and containment was [the fact] that there really was nothing that S. could do. His feelings resulted from the tragic consequence of being placed in a situation where he was impotent and helpless. His immense guilt was a reaction against this experience of helplessness. The child in his arms was helpless, and the child died.

Helplessness is equivalent to death, so rather than acknowledge his helplessness, he would condemn himself for living and blame himself for the child's death. S's fantasy was that if he [had been] a doctor with somehow the skill to save the child it would have been different. This is known as failed enactment whereby the veteran, by simultaneously experiencing the horror of the incident, also has an anticipatory plan of action to remedy the situation and in failing to do so suffers the consequences for that failure indefinitely.

This profound experience of guilt is not something essentially resolvable. Guilt is integral to the human experience, because it is from the experience of guilt that one draws the necessary insights into the morality of our actions - how they affect ourselves and others. As such, guilt is necessarily ambiguous and it is this aspect that facilitates a movement beyond this stuckness (sic) that characterises traumatic guilt. It provides the possibility of finding some alternate enactment for the image that haunts one, of undergoing personal transformation around that image.

S. had to recognise not only how much he had suffered but also how glad he was that he was alive. Perhaps the most uplifting moment in the whole treatment was when S. welcomed himself back. He allowed himself the pleasure of living again, bringing both relief and joy.

- 49 A summary and extracts from a mother's letter, written in Afrikaans, to Archbishop Tutu is further illustration of the various symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder:

My son was normal and had a happy childhood and successful career until his compulsory enlistment in the army for border duty. Here his problems started, i.e. serious drinking, trying like so many others to forget. He could not come to terms with the horrors of war ... His wife divorced him, leaving a seven-year-old son without a father.

- 50 His parents, who were pensioners, were devastated. They lost their house (literally) and their son (figuratively). He became an alcoholic. Ministers and family and friends shunned him. Eventually, the son became aggressive and assaulted his mother.

- 51 The mother wrote that she had no option but to "throw him out of the house". She says, "if the army could forget" then she "will have to as well". The letter continued:

One morning a 'bum' will be found dead - a child of God whose only mistake was to fight for his country... When you see the mothers sobbing for their children on TV you can understand how I feel. I hate the government for turning my son into a zombie. Somewhere, someone should start a place for such boys, because when he marches his troops through the night there must be many others doing similar things.

- 52 The following is an extract from a written statement to the Commission by Ms Anne-Marie MacGregor whose son, Wallace, died while he was doing duty in the SADF on the Namibian-Angolan border ¹⁴:

And then on Thursday, March 9, I was confronted with the total shock of the news of his death. I was told that my son was killed a few kilometres from Oshakati. He was brought home wrapped in a thick, sealed plastic bag. The instruction was that the plastic bag should not be opened. The only thing I know about the state my son was in is that all his limbs were intact. And this I heard from his uncle, who could only establish this by running his hands over this plastic bag.

Again, I accepted this as military law. You are not allowed to have the last glimpse of your own child - even as he lay there, lifeless. On the day of Wallace's funeral, his coffin wasn't opened. It is ten years since I last laid eyes on my child - nine years since he was laid to rest. But in these nine years, I've been struggling to complete the process of mourning for Wallace.

A part of me wonders if in fact it was him in that plastic bag. How can I lay him to rest within my heart, if I didn't see him go? When I lost my mother, whom I loved very much, I saw her, I touched her and therefore I was able to separate from her, release her and move on.

But with Wallace, there are so many questions that are still unanswered. In my struggle with my grief, I would like to know where exactly he died. How it had happened. Who was there with him when it happened? Did anybody help him to prevent it from happening? Who was the doctor who attended to him? I've never had the opportunity to ask these questions. Nobody has ever explained anything to me about my son's death.

They can say nobody asked, but who do you ask? And even if you do, you will not get any answers.

I sometimes see Wallace in the streets. I remember two distinct occasions, when I thought I was seeing him. And it turned out to be somebody who looked like him. My grief becomes more intense on the anniversaries of my son's death and on his birthday. He would have turned thirty in January. I've kept an album of all his photographs, as a way of dealing with the many feelings I have about the loss. But it is very hard, when there are so many things you are not sure about.

53 In a very poignant follow-up to this statement, the Commission facilitated a meeting between Ms MacGregor and a young man who had been with Wallace when he died. He told her exactly what had happened. As he described Wallace's last moments, she looked at him and said, "So, Wallace is really dead" and wept inconsolably for about ten minutes. It was only at that moment that she actually acknowledged and accepted that her son was dead.

54 The transition to a democratic South Africa, coupled with the very public process of the Commission, has complicated the healing process for many ex-convicts suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Many of the convicts treated by Ms De Ridder reported a recurrence and/or intensification of their symptoms as a result of some of the testimonies to the Commission and, particularly, the trial of and television documentary ("Prime Evil") about Eugene de Kock. To some extent, the Commission has helped release traumatised ex-convicts from 'the prison of silence' surrounding their experiences and, more importantly, their emotional responses to their experiences. Ms De Ridder says, however, that many others experience the current process as a form of retraumatisation:

While many of the convicts referred to here do not differentiate their anger to the old or the new regime, some focused intensely on their sense of being abandoned by their old leaders. The old society did not provide for any process of reintegration and failed to acknowledge their sacrifice. The new society condemns them as perpetrators, as defenders of apartheid.

55 In response to Mr Koen's submission, Commissioner Wendy Orr said:

I feel that you were describing the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Very many people in this room recognise those symptoms either in themselves or their brothers or their friends, their husbands, their boyfriends. Which leads me to realise that there are so many damaged and injured young men, amongst others, in this country who have been really very severely damaged by the experience of conviction. This leaves us with an immense challenge of what we do to heal that damage. That's one of the challenges that faces not only the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but all of us. Thank you for presenting that challenge to us today.

• THE WAY FORWARD

56 Submissions at this special hearing made it clear that dealing with the legacy of past armed conflicts will require a concerted effort, with contributions from the state, organised civil society and individual citizens.

- 57 The role of the state was illustrated by Lieutenant Colonel Botha's submission on a defence force project, Curamus Care for the Disabled, which was formed in 1990 to handle the treatment and aftercare "of our men and women who have been serving in the forces and have been injured in the process". This is an interdepartmental project which includes those injured while serving in the police and correctional services. Sitting in his wheel chair, Lieutenant Colonel Botha emphasised that the project, which is his full-time responsibility, includes those with physical and psychological disabilities such as post-traumatic stress disorder. He encouraged those who made individual submissions, like John Deegan, to come and discuss with him the possibilities of and procedures for applying for a military pension. He also spoke in his capacity as chairperson of the Curamus Association for Security Service Disabled, a voluntary association formed in October 1990 to give disabled members a platform to deal with their problems – for example finding employment within government and the private sector.
- 58 Mr Ian Bruce highlighted the possible role of groups in civil society. He shared the vision of a fellow ex-combatant, Marius van Niekerk (who is still based in Sweden), of forming a South African Veterans Association (SAVA). SAVA's basic mission, following in the footsteps of Vietnam veterans' self-help organisations, would be to create a formal network to help ex-combatants from across the political spectrum to come together and help each other with problems like post-traumatic stress disorder. Some specific projects might include helping ex-combatants to tell and write their stories, supporting the campaign against the use of landmines, initiating and supporting relief and reconstruction projects to help local populations in former operational areas, linking with churches and official military medical services, setting up and supporting special training programmes in post-traumatic stress disorder treatment for interested health professionals and so on. John Deegan, who has been working with Marius van Niekerk, expressed the vision of SAVA as follows:

So what I hope for, for the future then, is to find out answers to a lot of questions, but obviously within a structure. With the help of the Commission and, hopefully with the government's backing, we can possibly get a veterans' association off the ground which Marius and others have been working on for some years now. It hasn't been formalised, but there is a constitution, there's something on paper, it's concrete. All it has to do is get approval and we put it into gear ...

It's not a bunch of ex-soldiers getting together, having a braaivleis and swapping bush stories. What it is, is SWAPO, ANC, APLA, Umkhonto weSizwe, Koevoet, 'Reccies', all the units, every single unit, everybody who ever was trained in any way militarily getting together and just trying to make some kind of sense of the mess we made and doing something about it. Like, we talk about reparation and remorse and all this but, until we actually do something, like, tangible and physical, it's all words, it means nothing. So I'd really like to see the South African Veterans' Association, if that's what it's going to be called, get off the ground. And hopefully we can convene a national meeting at some point where we can express the aims of that and make it open to absolutely everybody who feels they might have a problem with post-traumatic stress disorder or anyone who was just connected with this whole conscription, with the whole military thing.

Part of the SAVA thing, then, would be to go back to Namibia, to actually go back and see the victims of our actions, their families. And to go and make reparation to the Namibians and to try and help and then just make sense of what actually happened there because it was absolute madness.

- 59 Various submissions, for example that of Professor Johan Hattingh, illustrated some of the ways in which individuals could creatively express their shared responsibility for what went wrong in the past and their commitment to a new South Africa:

To conclude, as I pointed out at the beginning, this is a personal statement describing some of the events, emotions and positions that I have experienced and lived through whilst serving as a conscript in the SADF. With hindsight, it is clear that I have collaborated with a military machine that has permeated throughout society and penetrated it very deeply. Insofar as this is the case, I share responsibility for the pain, suffering and death inflicted by that military machine within South Africa but also far outside of its borders.

I could argue that I am guilty of nothing because I only acted on orders handed down to me in terms of the law of the country. I prefer not to do so but rather, without sounding sentimental or trite, to tender my sincere personal apologies to all fellow South Africans who have suffered directly or indirectly from the actions of the SADF during the years of apartheid.

Looking back on the sad history related above, there is nothing that I am and can be proud of. On the contrary, I am humbled by a deep sense of shame for the fact that it only slowly dawned upon me that I was participating in, and then virtually did nothing about, the system that I described.

This is underlined by the ironic fact that I started to question the military structures I was conscripted into on the basis of what it did to me personally and not so much on the basis of what it did to others. The way in which I tried to compensate for this moral insensitivity is now currently to actively participate in community initiatives, striving towards the reconstruction and development of our country.

It gives me a deep sense of satisfaction to work with people who were formerly the declared enemies of the SADF or Citizen Force towards such seemingly small goals as securing a shelter for street children in Stellenbosch or helping community organisations to articulate their needs and translate them into viable development programmes.

- 60 Compulsory military conscription required many young white males in South Africa to face the reality of apartheid, bringing them face to face with the knowledge that a war was being fought. Some were socially conditioned to accept conscription as a national duty. Some saw no other option. Some saw options but were afraid of the consequences of refusing. Some were shocked and traumatised by what they experienced and began to question the world view they had always accepted. A few believed that, for a variety of very different reasons, it was their moral responsibility to refuse to serve in the military.
- 61 Often a change of attitude or a refusal to serve threw individuals, families, friends and even entire communities into crisis, triggering self-analysis and moral debate. Although the resistance against apartheid has always involved a small number of white people, conscription put young white men directly in touch with the moral costs and human consequences of maintaining it by military means.*

• APPENDIX 1

Structure of the SADF

Grey blocks indicate where conscripts were placed.

The numbers of people serving in the components in 1983 are indicated in brackets.

• APPENDIX 2

Table indicating number of people serving in the Civilian Force in 1980 and 1992

Year	Total Strength of CF in the SA Army	Percentage of army forces available for operation
1980	92 300	32%
1992	243 000	45%

Table indicating the Operational Deployment of Servicemen
(a company normally consisted of 120 men)

Year	No of Companies
1983	32
1984	48
1985	72
1986	90
1987	84
1988	82
1989	72

• APPENDIX 3

Year	Requirements	Initial Service	Compulsory Period of Service	Continuous Service Commitments
1946 - 51	Only volunteers	1 month	4 years	2 x 3 day camps
1952 - 61	Drafted numbers	3 months	4 years	1 x 30 day plus 2 x 15 day camps
1962 - 66	Drafted numbers	9 months	4 years	2 x 21 day camps
1967 - 73	Compulsory	12 months	10 years	3 x 26 days plus

	Service			5 x 12 day camps
1974 - 76	Compulsory Service	12 months	10 years	5 x 19 day camps
1977 - 82	Compulsory Service	24 months	10 years	8 x 30 day camps
1983 - 1992	Compulsory Service	24 months	24 months	6 cycles of 120 days each

• APPENDIX 4

Legislation

In terms of the South African Defence Act, 1912, the Union Defence Force was established and recognised as the armed force of the Union of South Africa. This Act was later replaced by The Defence Act, No 44 of 1957. All aspects of the SADF were thus controlled by law, and the levels of force used were provided in accordance with the Act.

In terms of Section 2 of the Act, females and persons not classified as white were excluded from compulsory military service. The tasks assigned to the SADF were predominantly within the scope of Section 3(2) of the Act:

Section 3

- (2) The South African Defence Force or any portion or member thereof may at all times be employed -
- (a) on service in defence of the Republic;
 - (b) on service for the prevention or suppression of terrorism;
 - (c) on service in the prevention or suppression of internal disorder in the Republic;
 - (d) on service in the preservation of life, health or property or the maintenance of essential services; and
 - (e) on such police duties as may be prescribed.