

## **SACBC SECRETARIAT STATEMENT ON THE DEFENCE AMENDMENT BILL (4/6/92)**

At the time of negotiation, it is clearly necessary to create new military structures to which all parties may pledge loyalty. It is inappropriate that the proposed amendments to the Defence Act maintain the structures of Apartheid, being applicable only to whites.

Recent court rulings indicate that failing to register for military service is not a crime. The purpose of the Bill is to declare such failure to be an offence, even when no penalty is prescribed. Here Apartheid structures are not only being maintained but also expanded. This affects the credibility of the government in its declared commitment to abolish all Apartheid structures.

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference has repeatedly called for recognition of moral and ethical grounds for exemption from military service. This has been provided for in the Bill, but limiting conscription to one racial group vitiates this concession. Voluntary service is already being applied successfully for other racial groups. Obviously, universal conscription is not an option for South Africa. So large a military force is not needed.

It is objectionable that national servicemen should be seconded to the Police Force without their consent. This would create compulsory police service. Under present circumstances, such action can only bring about further polarisation in our society.