

SACBC STATEMENT

ON

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION (23/3/1987)

The South African Catholic Bishops' Conference said it is appalled and saddened that conscientious objector Mr Phillip Wilkinson, 24, had been recharged by the state for failing to report for military camp. The charge followed his dramatic arrest in Johannesburg in April 1986 when he was to address an End Conscription Campaign meeting. He was whisked away in an unmarked car by two military policemen in plain clothes.

After a week Mr. Wilkinson appeared in court, was released on bail, but did not make any subsequent court appearance as he was detained for 111 days under the state of emergency. On his release in October he successfully applied for deferment, but was arrested again in January 1987. The bishops said when Mr Wilkinson was first arrested he must be allowed to refuse to do military duty.

“We again call on the government to amend the law to make provision for conscientious objection on moral grounds and stand by the recommendations of the Geldenhuys Commission: That alternative service be made available to all objectors, that this should be of the same length of time as national service, and that objectors be allowed to work in Church or welfare organisations. Mr Wilkinson's witness serves only to foster peace and justice and a stand like his demands the full support and blessing of the Church.

“The violence and war in South Africa cannot be solved by repression and the use of armed forces. Only when apartheid is abolished and human rights are observed, will there be peace in our land. More and more young servicemen are being forced to fight fellow South Africans. Mr Wilkinson has refused to do this because of his commitment to peace and justice.”