

PROFILE OF IDASA'S STUDENT



André Zaaiman

MR André Zaaiman was recently appointed to the IDASA staff as the co-ordinator of University programmes and is based in Johannesburg at the Transvaal regional office.

He was born in 1960 in the Cape Province but grew up on a farm in the Kroonstad district. He was educated at Grey College in Bloemfontein and represented the school in hockey and life-saving. He then attended the University of the Orange Free State where he distinguished himself academically, graduating with both a BA and BA Hons cum laude. He was awarded an Honours Badge by UOFS for his academic achievements. He is currently completing his Masters thesis in conflict studies through UCT.

Whilst at UOFS he also achieved the distinction of representing the OFS provincial teams in gymnastics, badminton and diving (he was the OFS diving champion at the time)! His current interests include nature conservation, hiking, literature and philosophy.

It was therefore a particularly courageous decision when he recently resigned and renounced his commission as an officer (captain) in the SA Defence Force, and then was one of the 143 conscripts who made public their refusal to serve in the SADF. On that occasion he made a public statement clarifying his decision. **The statement of 3.8.88 reads as follows:**

My name is André Zaaiman. I did my National Service in 1978 and 1979 at the Infantry School in Oudtshoorn where I became an Officer in the South African Defence Force. On completion of my National Service, I was allotted to the Military Unit of the University of the Orange

Free State for my camps, and I was made a Captain in this Unit. I have been to the Namibian border, I have served in Angola in the early eighties and have been involved in combat in both these areas.

In taking part in this stand:

* I again renounce publicly my Commission as an Officer in the SADF.

* I reconfirm my refusal to participate in any way in the SADF until the system of Apartheid has been done away with completely and until the SADF acts in the interest of all South Africans.

* I express my solidarity with conscientious objectors Ivan Toms and David Bruce.

* I rededicate myself to actively work towards the removal of racism and to bring about a truly non-racial democracy with economic justice in South Africa.

My statement addresses three questions, namely: Why have I served before in the SADF, Why have I been refusing to serve and Why am I prepared to go to prison for my refusal?

Why then did I serve initially?

I am an Afrikaner and was socialised into an Afrikaans way of life since childhood. Consequently, my perception of myself and the world around me was shaped through this process. It can be said that as a teenager I was very much the product of my society; and it was against this background that I reported for my National Service in 1978.

Through my military experience, I was led to believe that:

* South Africa's occupation of Namibia was legal

* that the SADF accepted that the solution to the conflict in both Namibia and South Africa, was 20% military and 80% political.

* that the SADF was a neutral force acting in the interest of all South Africans and Namibians, protecting them from an external aggressor.

* SWAPO and the ANC were not true nationalist movements and they both enjoyed very little popular support in their respective countries.

If one therefore takes these myths to be true, as I initially did, then one's participation in the SADF is

not only logical, but it becomes a matter of duty.

In addition to rejecting the mythology of the SADF, I have over the years, through intellectual debate and growth as well as through exposure to the realities of South Africa, come to question and finally reject the basic assumptions of the Afrikaner Nationalist paradigm. This process, difficult and traumatic as you can imagine, was so aptly described by the great Afrikaans writer, NP van Wyk Louw (*Liberale Nasionalisme*; 1958: 95) when he said, and I quote:

"Truth never constitutes the fruits of a problemless perception of the world; it is only laid bare in struggle. The great controversy lies in digging down under the base of the opposition, it is always undermining, it causes earlier thinking to collapse, and all this digging down is a digging down towards the bedrock."

South Africa as an objective reality has also changed considerably over the years, and all of this inevitably played a role in shaping my views. I can only remind you that we are living under the Third State of Emergency where the military plays a dominant role in taking political decisions through the State Security Council. SADF troops have been deployed in the townships. SADF troops execute political decisions that have no bearing on security matters (for example the recent use of SADF troops to seal off the campus at UWC to prevent the Nelson Mandela Birthday celebrations) and we are experiencing increasing militarisation in society in general.

The SADF also embarked on a campaign of destabilisation of the Southern African Region, and the international community has taken strong actions to demonstrate their disapproval of South Africa's policies.

I echo the sentiments of the Boer General, General J B M Hertzog (who incidentally protested, with all the other famous Boer Generals of the South African War, against the conscription of South Africans for the invasion of Namibia (then German South West Africa) during the First World War) when he complained in Parliament about the lack of individual rights in South

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Africa in 1915 (I quote from Hansard, which in those days gave only a summary of the speeches):

"There was no liberty of speech for the public; no liberty of the Press, and all the ordinary liberties of the public had been taken away. They had nothing less than a despotism such as they found nowhere else in the world where there was any semblance of constitutional government. ... He would do his best while he was in Parliament to prevent the people from coming under slave rule, and especially slavery as a result of the acts of the Minister of Defence. The Minister would do well to listen to the voice of the people" (1 March 1915: 20-22).

It is also clear that the government, historically through apartheid and presently through control over the media, is deliberately striving to keep any knowledge of the objective realities of South Africa away from the public.

I now deal with the second part of my statement, namely, why I refuse to serve in the SADF. And it is clear that this question has in part been answered in the previous section. In brief then, my refusal to serve revolves around the following points:

1. I am not prepared to fight or to die for Apartheid or the National Party. I fail to see how the Government can negotiate with so-called Communist States such as Mozambique, Angola and even Cuba, and then pretend that the reason why they cannot negotiate with SWAPO or the ANC is because they are so-called Communist organisations.
2. I do not believe that the present Government is legitimate in the sense that it is based on the consensus of the majority of the people of South Africa. This statement is borne out by the lack of political rights for the majority of South Africans as well as the need for a State of Emergency, reflecting the unpopularity of the present government.
3. I believe that both South Africa and Namibia are involved in civil wars; no foreign troops have set foot on South African or Namibian soil. I further believe that SWAPO and the ANC have substantial support from within their respective

countries, as well as long histories of attempting to settle the conflicts peacefully.

4. I am definitely not going to risk my life in a war that is both unjust and futile, whilst politicians try to convince us that we are supposedly fighting for the protection of non-existent "civilised" and democratic values. I do not believe that this government knows what is best for me or for South Africa, and they should stop using pseudo-patriotic arguments to mislead and blackmail people into protecting the selfish interests of the National Party.

5. The SADF is playing a destabilising role outside South Africa through its actions in the neighbouring states, as well as inside South Africa through, amongst other things, harassment of democratic organisations and the deployment of troops in townships.

6. The occupation of Namibia by the SADF is illegal. In 1950, 1955, 1956 and in 1971, the International Court of Justice held that the United Nations had succeeded to the supervisory powers of the League of Nations. In 1971 the Court held that the United Nations had lawfully revoked South Africa's mandate for South West Africa and that the continued presence of South Africa was, and therefore is, illegal.

7. The South African government has committed itself to the implementation of Resolution 435 in Namibia which implies, inter alia, the holding of free and fair elections in that country. We can then safely presume that SWAPO will play a major part in these elections and that they stand a good chance of winning them. If the Government has already committed itself to a process that could potentially or is even likely to lead to a political victory for SWAPO in Namibia, then I would like to know why we still have to battle with that organisation. The death of every single person in that war has become totally senseless and unnecessary.

8. A Cuban withdrawal from Angola is not going to prevent a political victory for SWAPO in Namibia. Therefore, South Africa's actions in Angola, at the great cost of human lives, did not even make strategic sense.

9. I am not, in principle, opposed to the SADF. I think from a soldier's perspective, it is a fine and well-trained force with a proud history in both the First and Second World Wars. But it has become an instrument of deliberate and large-scale repression, serving narrow political ends in the name of democracy and freedom. I, and many other young South Africans, are not prepared to sacrifice our lives in the defence of tyranny.

Finally, I think my reasons for risking a jail-sentence have become obvious.

On 2 March 1915, General Hertzog was asked in Parliament why he never spoke out against the Boer General who in 1914 refused to be conscripted into the Union Army in order to invade the then German South West Africa. Hansard sums up his reply as follows:

"Either he (Hertzog) must say what they (the government) wanted him to say, or he must speak his mind openly to the public. If he had spoken openly, he and many others would have been in jail: where many others are at present. If he had said what the Minister of Defence wanted him to say and what pleased him, he would have become a political prostitute. What would the Minister have thought? For much less than he would have spoken, people have been imprisoned. He had been given the choice between prison on the one side, and political prostitution on the other."

I am not a political prostitute. And I have given to you today my convictions and beliefs as honestly as I can. It was Albert Camus who said "that in every act of rebellion, the man concerned experiences not only a feeling of revulsion at the infringement of his rights, but also a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself. Thus, he implicitly brings into play a standard of values so far from being false, that he is willing to preserve them at all costs" (Camus; *The Rebel*: 19).

If truth then, as N P van Wyk Louw has suggested, is only laid bare in struggle; if going to prison in order to remain true to oneself is part of this struggle, then, so be it.