

SUPPORT FOR IVAN TOMS

On March 3 1988 Dr Ivan Toms was sentenced to 630 days imprisonment. (The maximum sentence asked for by the state.) His "crime" was to refuse to serve a one month camp in the SADF. Ivan graduated as a doctor from UCT in 1976. From there he reluctantly went into the army. Although his religious, moral and political convictions told him the SADF was being used to defend apartheid, the alternatives of leaving the country, living in hiding, or even spending time in jail were too harsh to consider. Ivan's experiences in the operational area and on the Angolan border made him feel that "...the Namibian people....do not want the SADF in their country; international law says that South Africa has no right to be there....". Since 1984, SADF troops have been used to "control" the black townships and to suppress resistance to apartheid. Ivan saw their violence while working as a doctor for 6 years in the Crossroad community. These events lead Ivan to say " I am committed to South Africa and I believe that the truly patriotic action for me is to go to prison rather than deny my faith and my beliefs."

At present the law provides for community service only to conscripts who are both religious and pacifist. They are forced to do 6 years of service in a government institution. In sentencing a person like Ivan to prison, we are losing for a while, an individual with valuable skills who is committed to working for communities and not for private gain. The editorial collective of CRITICAL HEALTH expresses its solidarity with Ivan Toms, as a health worker and as a committed South African, and supports his call for constructive alternative service to be the same length as military service and for this option to be available to ALL conscripts (not only religious/pacifists) in non-government organisations.