

A group of Sydney women, mothers of sons conscripted or eligible for conscription, feel so strongly that the conscription of under age boys for overseas service is morally wrong that they are determined to oppose it.

They have come together and issued a distress call, SOS, to mothers everywhere to save their sons from conscription for overseas service, particularly in Vietnam. These women are convinced that if the defence of our country was at stake there would be masses of volunteers. But under the pretext of defence we are being forced to participate in what our Asian neighbours may well believe to be an invasion of their country.

Together with Church Ministers of Australia and U.S.A., the United Nations and many world leaders, we believe the situation should be resolved at the conference table.

Convenor of SOS is Mrs. Joyce Golgerth, who has a son in the first batch of conscripts. Mrs. Golgerth says: "Mothers resist all sorts of pressures to bring up their children as useful citizens, to look forward to useful careers and to be of service to the community. Then suddenly their lives are disrupted. After six months training these boys could be sent overseas for 4½ years war service. They could come home maimed or blinded, or die in a war which has been described as a bottomless pit of violence and horror."

Members of SOS are not only concerned with their own personal involvement. Of serious import to all is the flagrant breach of human rights and freedom which this form of conscription entails.

One of the basic laws of our society establishes the authority and responsibility of the parent until a minor attains the age of 21. Such boys must have their parents' consent to marry, to buy a car or a house, to join the navy or obtain a passport for overseas travel. Yet here we have the complete denial of this right, where minors are conscripted without any reference to, much less consideration of, the parental attitude. Morally there can be no justification whatever for the forcing of young men to take life.

Above all, this legislation directly contravenes many of the Articles in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights - particularly we refer to Article 30 which states that "nothing in the Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, Group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act (for example, conscription) aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein."

Activities of the Sydney branch of SOS, a non-party political, non-sectarian movement, so far include support for the Canberra vigil of Bishops and Clergy, interviews with Federal Ministers, a petition to the Prime Minister, marching in the Hiroshima Day march and press, radio and TV interviews.

We hope that further activities along these lines - and others that opportunity may present - will be conducted in every State of the Commonwealth.

As individuals we may feel powerless. But a nationwide movement of earnest determined women could force our Government to review its legislation.

This statement is authorised by Mrs. J. Golgerth, 20 Maple Ave., Pennant Hills (WJ3496), Mrs. P. Ashcroft, 31 George St., Pennant Hills (84-1931) and Mrs. A. Gregory, 47 Ballast Point Rd., Balmain (82-4712).