

Reporting From South Africa

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South Africa's \$5 billion decision to build warships, fighter aircraft and helicopters and to create 65,000 defense-related jobs is drawing increasing fire from a broad-based coalition of research and activist groups opposed to what it says is unnecessary military spending.

Terry Crawford-Browne, chairman of ECAAR-South Africa, reports that Archbishop Ndungane has taken the debate to the nation's airwaves and print media to convince policymakers and the public that the money could be more wisely spent feeding the country's poor. He notes that Patricia de Lille of the Pan Africanist Congress, Vanan Pillay, the director of the Industrial Participation Program at the Department of Trade and Industry and others, have joined Ndungane in the debate against what they call the misuse of public funds. Parliament is currently in recess, but leaders of the various social organizations plan to continue the debate when it reconvenes in late January.

In the meantime, some of these leaders plan to spend the next several weeks enlisting support for their position from the local business community. Crawford-Browne recently said he was involved in the production of a television documentary that highlighted "the contradictions of spending R29 billion [the equivalent to \$5 billion in U.S. currency] on weapons with the crises of poverty in South Africa." He and others involved in the television production hope it will develop into a series relating to human security issues, including the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and domestic violence. "Yesterday," he said, "I was in Johannesburg to make a submission to a workshop organized by the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) on the weapons procurement program and the lure of R110 billion in offsets and 65,000 jobs. I am hopeful that NUMSA's central committee will come out with us in opposing the deal. They also 'smell a rat' about all the promises of jobs."

He hopes members of the Association of West European Parliamentarians for Africa will help mobilize "European opinion" against the Government's \$5 billion defense and jobs creation plan. The Church of Sweden, he said, has threatened to sell its shareholdings in any Swedish company that supports or participates in the defense program. He also said, Saab, the Swedish auto and aircraft maker, has conceded that none of its "R48.3 billion in offsets for 23,195 jobs is in place. I am hoping that this will prove to be very far from a 'done deal,' and that the government ends up with considerable egg on its face."

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