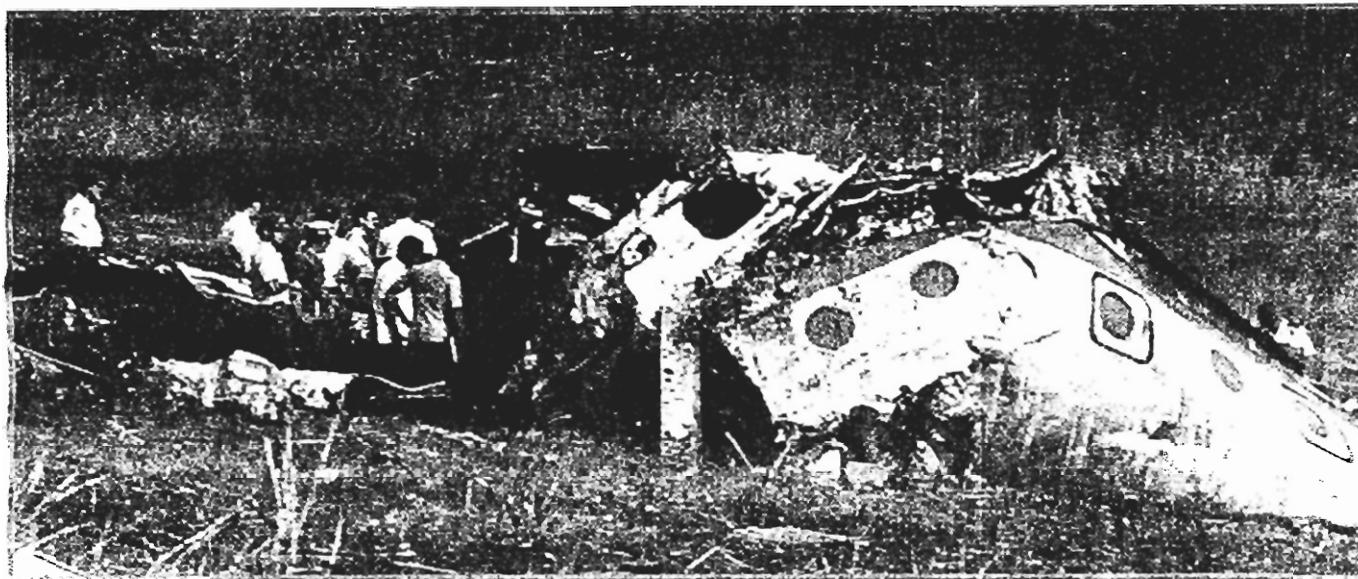


Top-secret inquiry into Machel crash

The Times (Jhb) 12/12/12



SAMORA MACHEL



BLOODY SCENE: Investigators at the wreckage of the Russian-built plane that carried Mozambican president Samora Machel and 33 other people which crashed in South Africa two decades ago

GRAEME HOSKEN

A TOP-SECRET inquiry has been launched into the plane crash that killed Mozambican president Samora Machel more than two decades ago.

The investigation by the Hawks began in earnest last month after a tip-off in January implicated apartheid state officials in security agencies, including the former SA Defence Force.

A two-week investigation by *The Times* has revealed a multigovernmental agency inquiry — involving the police, the National Prosecuting Authority and the Civil Aviation Authority — started in November.

President Jacob Zuma is

Hawks investigating leads against apartheid officials

said to have sanctioned the inquiry, running separate to another conducted by the Justice Department.

Presidential spokesman Zanele Mngadi, whose office acknowledged the investigation, referred questions to the Hawks.

Zuma's approval is believed to have been obtained after the collection of evidence that include files of documents, photographs and voice recordings in September.

The 15-member investigation team, comprising South African and Mozambican police, obtained the evidence after the January tip-off.

The *Times* has learnt the latest development took place last week when police crime scene experts took aerial photos and GPS readings at a restricted military zone at Mariepskop, Mpumalanga.

The site has specialised radars which feed intelligence aerial information from across Southern Africa to various air force bases.

Mariepskop, near God's Window, is close to Mbuluzi where Machel's plane crashed, killing him and 24 others. Nine people survived.

The source said: "Numerous reports from the Margo Commission are being re-

viewed along with photographs and transcripts of flight voice data and air traffic control recordings."

In 1987, Judge Cecil Margo exonerated South Africa of any involvement in the crash, citing pilot error.

Russian experts concluded the crash was because of a decoy signal stronger than that at Maputo airport.

In 1994, the cause of Machel's death was the subject of a closed Truth and Reconciliation Commission inquiry, which at the time had evidence which linked the crash to former SA Defence Force activities.

Yesterday, NPA spokes-

man Makhosini Nkosi referred all questions to the Hawks.

Hawks spokesman Captain Paul Ramaloko confirmed the investigation.

"We are working with our Mozambican counterparts."

Mozambique embassy police attache Zachery Cossa said it was aware of the investigation.

Civil Aviation Authority spokesman Phindiwe Gwebu confirmed it was involved.

An aviation source said: "The possible role of certain people have been identified. Those alive cannot be allowed to escape justice like those who have died."

Advocate Dumisa Ntsebeza, who led the TRC investigation, said he had been approached by the Hawks.

"I was asked to reactivate my team. I told them if they had the budget we could. I have heard nothing from them since."

Ntsebeza said the investigation should have been done 14 years ago, "when we told the Justice Department what needed to be done".

"We handed over 43 files of documents pertaining to murders, which we were unable to fully investigate because of time constraints. Among those files was this case," he said.

"Those documents contain

● Continued on Page 2

THE MACHEL MYSTERY

'Military intelligence set this up'

● From Page 1

detailed information, including a sworn statement by a military intelligence agent involved in setting up the false beacon.

"This agent detailed accounts of a meeting held the day before the crash, where this was planned. He gave names of those at the meeting, held at the former security police base, Skwamans, situated close to the crash site. The next day these people were the first on the scene.

"Among those there were ministers and top military brass, including Pik Botha; former defence force chief, General Kat Liebenberg who died from cancer in the 1990s, and former military intelligence chief General "Joffel" van der Westhuizen"

Ntsebeza said: "What we discov

ered justified further investigations including that the South African government was not 'uninvolved'.

"People die, memories fade, documents lost and time gained to cover tracks. If Samora Machel was lured to his death on South African soil it is a crime and a proper criminal investigation should have been conducted."

Ntsebeza said the Justice Department had a duty to prosecute those linked to the crime.

He said Machel's wife, Graca told the TRC of a crisis meeting in Malawi in February 1984, after Machel threatened to close Malawi's sea access if it did not stop providing assistance to Renamo.

"The possibility of assassinating Machel was allegedly discussed at

this meeting. The following week, Malawi's president sent officials to meet President PW Botha, who sent a message of solidarity to Malawi through a delegation headed by Magnus Malan [the SA defence minister at the time].

"It was Graca Machel's belief the meeting discussed the formation of a special team to monitor Machel's movements, who was under enormous pressure at the time of his death even from his own party. Graca Machel — a member of Machel's cabinet — confirmed attempts on his life at his residence and South Africa's attempts to attack Maputo. Machel, at the time of his death, was engaged in a radical restructuring of his government and military which could have upset a number of high-ranking

Mozambicans."

Defence analyst Helmoed Heitman questioned the motive of the investigation. "If the South African government wanted to kill Machel, there were simpler ways of doing it. I was privy to a briefing by a team of air force investigators ... certain allegations that the pilots were drunk were incorrect ... the crash's cause pointed to human errors, miscommunication and crew arrogance in terms of ignoring numerous warnings."

Former Foreign Affairs minister Pik Botha yesterday welcomed the new "inquiry"

"But only as long as it, like the Margo Commission, includes international aviation crash investigation experts. People forget the commission also consisted of ex-

perts from the UK and US."

Responding to suspicions from the truth commission about his quick arrival at the crash scene, Botha slammed the accusations and those around South Africa's involvement. "The commission came to the finding South Africa was not involved — not me and not the then government. As to my quick presence on the scene; this is [in accordance] with international protocol. I was never questioned over it then. I don't mind being questioned now," he said adding that after being alerted that Machel was suspected of being on board he, with president PW Botha's approval flew to the scene.

He questioned the truth commission's expertise to make its findings.