

South African President Expresses “Deep Regret” Over Machel’s Death

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Excerpt from dispatch datelined Johannesburg, 20th October:

President Samora Machel of Mozambique is dead. The President was among 38 people aboard a Soviet-built twin-engined Tupolev-134A jet that crashed in South Africa last night. The jet was bound for Maputo from Zambia. State President P.W. Botha, in a statement, expressed “deep regret” and “profound shock” at Mr Machel’s death.

News of the crash was announced early this morning by Foreign Affairs Minister Mr Pik Botha, who at first gave no indication that it was a Mozambican plane or that President Machel was aboard. But Mr Botha’s statement said the Police Commissioner, Gen Johan Coetzee, had made his way to the crash site.

In Lisbon, the MNR claimed today that the Mozambican Ministers of Defence and Transport had also died last night in the crash.

In Maputo, official Radio Mozambique today began broadcasting solemn classical music after announcing that President Machel was “missing”. A Politburo member and Parliamentary Secretary, Mr Marcelino dos Santos, said on the radio [that] President Machel had not returned as scheduled from a one-day trip to Zambia yesterday. He appealed for calm.

In Lusaka, Mozambique's Ambassador confirmed President Machel's official jet had crashed in South Africa on its return from Zambia to Mozambique last night. The envoy, Mr Joao Juliao Cuambe, said confirmation that the craft was President Machel's had come from Maputo.

The cause of the crash was not immediately known. Mr Pik Botha said there were four survivors. They were being treated in hospital.

President Machel had been to a Zambian resort - Kisaba Bay - for a meeting with President Kenneth Kaunda, President Jose Eduardo dos Santos of Angola and the Zairean leader, Mr Mobutu Sese Seko. Official Radio Mozambique said President Machel had been scheduled to return home at 9.30 pm yesterday. When the plane did not arrive a search began to trace it. South African authorities informed Mozambique of the crash just before 6 am today.

A spokesman for Mr P.W. Botha said from the President's Office the South African head of state "has expressed his deep regret and profound shock at the death of President Samora Machel and members of his entourage in an air disaster near the border between South Africa, Swaziland and Mozambique, last night". "South Africa has lost an influential ally in its efforts to develop the economies of southern Africa since the signing of the Incomati accord."

Mr Botha had "come to know and respect President Machel", and they had last had "cordial discussions" at the coronation of Swaziland's new king earlier this year. The spokesman pointed out that as recently as last week (in Potigetersrus) Mr Botha had expressed the hope the Incomati accord could still be of great assistance to efforts in the region directed at the establishment of sound economic relations between the states of the region. "The State President expressed on behalf of himself, Mrs Botha, the government and the people of South Africa, deep regret at the tragedy and offered his condolences to the families of the victims and to the people of Mozambique." The message had been conveyed to the Mozambique government by telegram this morning.

In his message, Mr Pik Botha said he wished to convey "my sincere condolences to the Mozambique government and to Mrs Machel, and her family, on the tragic loss of President Machel and those who were with him. I personally came to know President Machel as one of the great leaders of Africa for whom I had the highest respect and regard as a leader and a man. He was someone with whom I could discuss the many problems confronting our two countries, our region and our continent. Despite the differences between our two governments, our problems became easier to handle after discussion of them with President Machel". . .