

Johannesburg: Machel Inquiry Discredits "False Charges"

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Text of commentary:

For weeks after the death of former President Samora Machel of Mozambique in an air crash in October last year, the blame was laid at South Africa's door. The most scurrilous accusations, including direct involvement by means of shooting down the aircraft, came from many quarters. There was not the slightest attempt at restraint by South Africa's accusers. Two of the more deplorable accusations were that South Africa had lured the aircraft to its destruction by means of a false beacon and that President Machel had died because he had not been treated timeously by South African medical personnel.

These are two of the false charges which have been thoroughly discredited by an international board of enquiry into the accident being held in the Rand Supreme Court in Johannesburg. The hearing was told that with a false beacon it might have been possible to lead the ill-fated plane off course, but it could not have led it to disaster. The only beacon which in the circumstances could have led the plane off course would have been a radio beam [words indistinct]. The use of such a beacon, according to Sir Edward Eveleigh, a British Lord Justice of Appeal, would have been a pretty poor effort by any party wishing to ensure the aircraft's destruction. Sir Eveleigh is one of three international experts on the six-man board of enquiry.

Evidence before the board, in the words of another overseas expert, Col Frank Borman, an American spaceship commander, pointed to incredibly poor crew performance as a cause of the plane's crash.

Medical evidence is that President Machel had been killed instantly. From the gruesome details presented to the inquiry about his injuries, there is no way that he could have survived the crash. His mutilated body had been identified at the scene of the crash only by the gold fillings in his teeth.

As the evidence accumulates, South Africa's accusers are being exposed by reasoned logic and considered opinion, qualities which they so obviously lack.