

Mozambique Paper Casts Doubts on Pik Botha's Evidence to Inquiry

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Text of report (ME/8476/ii):

Rumours, slanders, lies and smoke-screens do not help to alleviate the strong suspicions in the hearts of all Mozambicans, which are shared by millions of honest men in our continent and the rest of the world. This is how today's Maputo 'Noticias' editorial ends. The editorial deals with the statements by Minister of Foreign Affairs Pik Botha at the hearing in the Johannesburg Supreme Court into President Samora Machel's air crash in Mbuzini in October 1986.

The editorial points out that Roelof Botha made two very serious statements soon after the tragedy, which proved to be false. The first statement said that the pilots could have been drunk; and the other was that the aircraft was obsolete and did not have a modern ground proximity warning system. Confronted with factual evidence yesterday, Mr Roelof Botha was at pains to explain that if he had made false statements it was because at the time he thought they were correct. This was so because someone, whom he did not identify, from the Ministry of Transport had given him the information. In other words, Botha himself had been deceived.

The editorial continues by saying that taking for granted the naivety and credibility of South African, Mozambican and world public opinion, Mr Botha also said that when he stated that there was alcohol in the blood of the pilots he did not infer that they were drunk. In order to justify his false statements, Botha said that he believed it was his duty to minimise the devastating effect of allegations that the South African Air Force was responsible for the plane crash. The editorial stresses that the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs admitted that he played an active role in a deliberate disinformation campaign aimed at disguising the possible responsibility of his government.

The 'Noticias' editorial then puts three questions to the Pretoria regime:

- (1) If Mr Botha - confronted with hard evidence - admitted that he made false statements on such a delicate matter, who can assure us that other statements made by him and other regime officials were not equally false?
- (2) If the Pretoria regime is in fact innocent about the plane crash, what was the need to create a smoke-screen and spread rumours and lies worldwide?
- (3) What is Mr Roelof Botha trying to hide with his statements yesterday and on previous occasions; and from whom?