

## SA crash report rejected

Mozambique and the Soviet Union have rejected the findings of the South African commission of inquiry set up to investigate the 20 October air crash which killed Mozambique's president Samora Machel.

The report, released on 9 July, concludes the crash was caused by pilot error and negligence on the part of the crew of the Soviet-made Tupolev-134A.

The commission, in which Mozambique and the Soviet Union did not participate, found unanimously that the crew "failed to follow procedural requirements for an instrument landing," descending instead under "visual flight rules in darkness and some cloud." As the aircraft descended the crew was unable to see the ground but allowed it to drop below the minimum prescribed altitude of 3,000 feet and ignored the ground proximity warning system alarm. Had the crew pulled up when the alarm sounded, the crash could have been avoided, the report infers.

The commission – headed by Judge C S Margo and including former British European Airways chairman Geoffrey Wilkinson and former commander of the Apollo 8 space flight Colonel Frank Borman – rejected the theory that the aircraft was lured off course by a decoy beacon inside South Africa. It suggested instead that high-frequency signals from Swaziland's Matsapa airport may have distracted the crew. Mozambique, however, has rejected this conclusion, on the grounds that the commission insufficiently investigated why the plane made the premature turn to the right some 100 kilometres north of Maputo, and insisted that the possibility of a decoy

beacon must be fully studied. The Soviet Union – which set up its own commission to investigate the crash – says the South African inquiry's findings were not objective. "Awkward attempts are being made to explain the causes of the air accident by erroneous actions by the Soviet crew," the commission told the official Soviet news agency TASS. "By coming up with another cause for the catastrophe Pretoria is making another political manoeuvre to mislead public opinion and conceal its reluctance to establish the truth."

Machel and 34 others were killed when the jet crashed into a hillside just inside South Africa (AED 25:10:86).