

Nelson Mandela has pledged to find the truth of the Mozambican leader's death. Pik Botha also thinks it would be a good idea

# Re-open Machel death inquiry, says Pik

David Shapshak

**F**ORMER foreign minister Pik Botha says re-opening the Samora Machel crash inquiry may be the only way "to clear up lingering doubts" about the circumstances in which the Mozambique president died 10 years ago.

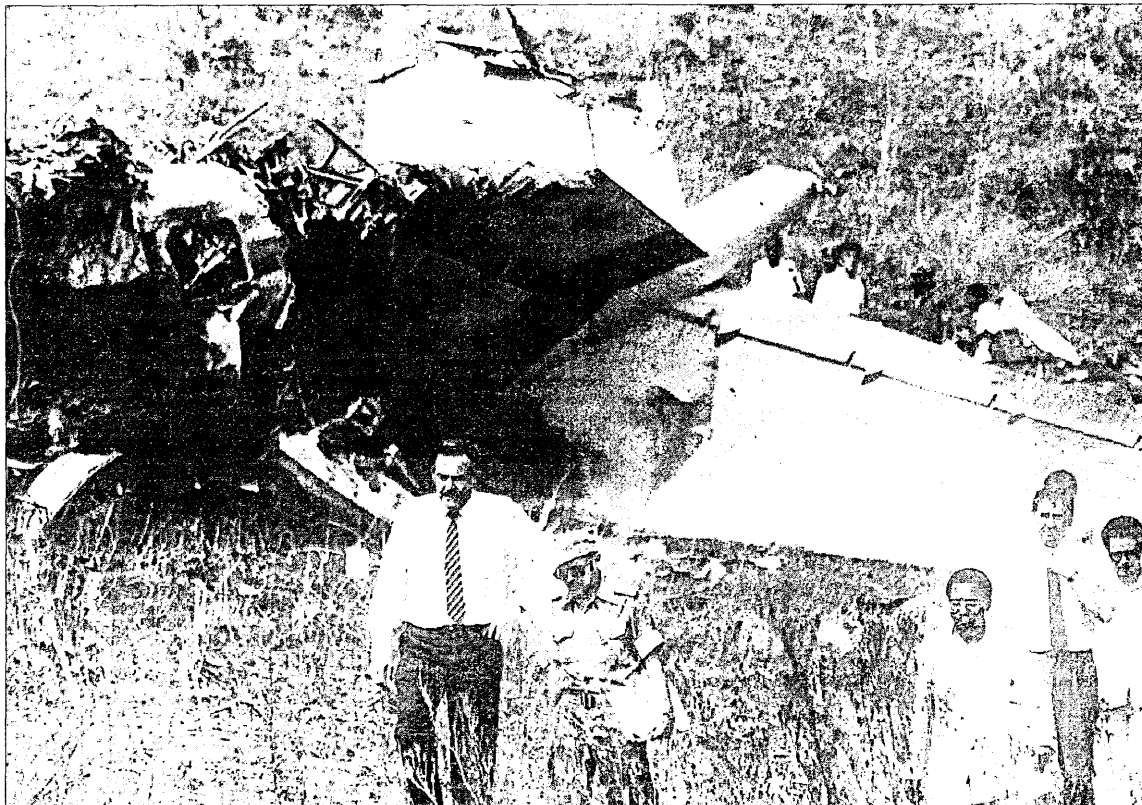
His call follows an emotional ceremony at the site of the crash last week when President Nelson Mandela, watching a tearful Graça Machel lay a wreath in memory of her husband, vowed to uncover the truth about the disaster.

"Certainty about the precise chain of events which robbed Africa of one of her greatest leaders still eludes us," said Mandela. "There are unanswered questions along the journey that led to the loss of more than 30 lives on this hillside. And we shall leave no stone unturned to ensure that, in the fullness of time, nothing but the whole truth is known about these events."

Botha, who was centrally involved in events of the time said: "I can understand there are lingering doubts, suspicions. Let's investigate them. I am fairly convinced we did everything we could, that the inquiry was properly done... for example, we sent the voice recorder for analysis to a European country, and it was my task to see that a clinical, fair investigation was conducted."

"Perhaps only [a new investigation] will allay those suspicions. I have learned recently that anything is possible. I have learned [through revelations at the trial of Eugene de Kock] that we were deceived and that we took some decisions on the basis of false information."

Judge Cecil Margo, who headed up the official inquiry, said it would be possible to reopen the investigation, but only if new evidence was produced.



Pik Botha at the crash in 1986: He says the inquiry should be re-opened

PHOTOGRAPH: JACCOB RYKLIFF, COURTESY OF THE STAR

He said the technical investigations had been through and that the recovery of the flight recorder and cockpit recordings had given them all the material necessary for their conclusions.

He emphatically denied that he could have been a victim of a security force cover-up or conspiracy. "That's ridiculous, we had the flight recorder right in front of us," he said. Civil Aviation Authority chief director

Rennie van Zyl told the M&G that there is no new evidence about the crash to dig up. He said the tripartite technical team (consisting of South African, Mozambican and Russian investigators) did an "exceptional job as far as

the factual basis was concerned".

"There was nothing unexplored. It was a pure operations and human-related accident," he said, laying the blame squarely with the "incompetent" Russian aircrew.



Mozambican military at the crash

PHOTOGRAPH: JACCOB RYKLIFF, COURTESY OF THE STAR