

Has the TRC

Prehonia
News

found a $\frac{20/5}{98}$

smoking gun?

It was an interesting and perhaps confusing choice of words by the the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's investigative head, Dumisa Ntsebeza, when he said the TRC had been presented with "new evidence" linking the Machel aircraft crash with activities of the former South African Defence Force (SADF).

He could rather have distanced himself more objectively from the fresh disclosures by calling them "claims". The word evidence might be interpreted by some as a finding on the veracity of it. We eagerly await the outcome of the in-camera inquiry on June 4, however, to hear the TRC's formal pronouncement on how dependable it finds the new testimony.

Presumably the TRC will be sifting anecdotal, even hearsay material, on June 4. We assume also that this may be the reason for shutting its doors, a decision this newspaper find disconcerting. The issue of preventing wild allegations damaging individuals could be addressed by forbidding the publication of the identities of people implicated – until they have had time to respond.

Prompt, full disclosure on the strength of what the TRC hears is, in our view, a poor second best.

If the TRC does find a smoking gun, is it the right body to pursue a new investigation to its conclusion? We think not. Probes into the Machel tragedy and the unsolved Helderberg mystery are better left to Attorneys-General and a variety of available investigators qualified to dig for facts which often lurk in highly technical data.

While the TRC dare not spurn intelligence on what may amount to mass murders, is it not running the risk of turning itself into a circus by taking such a profile through formal hearings? Quiet interviews may have sufficed to test the "new evidence".