

TRC hears evidence of Machel plane crash

CAPE TOWN. – A former Mozambican official with close ties to the late President Samora Machel was among several witnesses who testified behind closed doors at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing yesterday into the 1986 air crash which claimed the life of Mozambique's first democratic president.

TRC spokesman Mr Vuyani Green said the "highly-placed former official" – who was not related to Pres Machel nor a member of his cabinet – was questioned about South Africa's relationship with Mozambique at the time of Pres Machel's

death. *Civ. 5/6/98*
Other witnesses called by the TRC's investigative unit included a former defence force military operative and a former captain at the security branch in Komatipoort, who was apparently the first person at the scene of the crash.

Mr Green said it was unlikely that the one-day hearing, at the TRC's Cape Town headquarters, would continue today.

The identity of the witnesses could not be disclosed for fear of their safety.

The inquiry followed new evidence linking activities of the former

South African Defence Force to the crash, he said.

Pres Machel and 33 others were killed when the Tupolev aircraft in which they were travelling from Malawi to Mozambique crashed near Komatipoort.

A 1987 inquiry under the chairmanship of Mr Justice Cecil Margo said the crash was caused by pilot error.

However, Russian experts who helped with the investigation concluded that the plane crashed due to its crew responding to a decoy homing signal rather than the real signal from Maputo Airport. – Sapa.