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Maputo - Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano has dismissed recent allegations that he played a role in the death of the country's first president, killed in a plane crash 17 years ago.

In a televised interview, Chissano said the allegations "make no sense and were made by people either in the country or outside striving to reach certain obscure objectives".

Chissano said he did not understand the motive behind the "campaign" when he has already stated he will relinquish power next year.

"This is just a senseless campaign which I doubt comes from our opposition because I no longer constitute a political threat to any political party," he said.

Chissano's statement came a fortnight after opposition leader Afonso Dhlakama urged the president to publicly react to the allegations or risk having his reputation tainted.

A former South African intelligence officer Tienie Groenewald claimed recently that Chissano helped mastermind the plane crash that killed former president Samora Machel in October 1986.

Machel was flying back to Mozambique from a summit in Zambia when his Russian-built Tupolev aircraft slammed into a hillside in South Africa after being drawn off course by a private beacon broadcasting on the same frequency as Maputo airport.

No formal relations

Chissano who was then foreign minister succeeded Machel.

The president said that, as foreign minister, he was not allowed to have any contact with apartheid South Africa as the two countries had no formal relations.

"The only contact I had was with the ANC (African National Congress)," he said.

Dhlakama, leader of opposition Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo), also demanded that Chissano comment in public on allegations that his son was involved in the assassination of leading investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso.

Cardoso was gunned down in late 2000 as he probed allegations of a huge fraud at a formerly state-run commercial bank.

The president's son Nyimpine Chissano is currently under investigation following claims by convicted assassins of Cardoso that he paid for the murder to be carried out.

Chissano said: "Let us wait for the results of the investigation, I do not wish to influence the course of the inquiry".