

Harare demo

BESIDES the grief at his untimely loss the death of President Samora Machel has evoked understandable outrage.

As a friend and benefactor of this country during the darkest days of the liberation struggle Cde Machel holds a special place in the hearts of Zimbabweans.

His death in a plane crash returning from a mission designed to bring closer that day when South Africans too will be free was bound to rouse passions.

But anger used in support of the cause of freedom is one thing, allowing it to spill over into disobedience and violence as happened on the streets of Harare yesterday is quite another.

Public protest registered in a cool, calm, controlled manner earns both respect and attention. But the stoning or setting on fire of offices, the wrecking of cars and the beating up of motorists and pedestrians, as occurred yesterday, earns nothing but contempt.

For who among the demonstrators can tell for sure if some of their street victims were not in fact just as grief-stricken as they themselves were over President Machel's death but decided to accept the loss in a more rational way?

It is a great measure of maturity and clear-headedness if during a dangerous situation, such as the one all of Southern Africa is going through, people, especially those at the highest institution of learning like the university, allow themselves to be guided by reason rather than by their emotions.

Now it remains very questionable whether the message sunk in after the demonstrators chose quite the wrong medium in the end to express their grief which, by all accounts, was genuine.

It is that tendency to take the law into one's hands, as was witnessed on the streets of our capital, which plays dangerously into the hands of our enemies and unfortunately reaps for the country rather than for the thugs involved a very bad name indeed.

At any rate, does not the property that was damaged belong to Zimbabwe? It indeed is our national infrastructural property and the students would have quite easily and effectively achieved the goal of their demonstration by peacefully presenting protest messages to those concerned and then leaving quietly.

Any attempts now to blame the violence that erupted on those who jumped on the "bandwagon" is a futile exercise to absolve the university students from full responsibility for what happened in what was truly their show.

We might hasten to say that if they were clear-headed and properly organised no loopholes should have existed for those they now blame to have exploited.

The response by the police once matters started to go out of hand should be commended. But perhaps a strong police presence right from the start would have kept the demonstrators in check and thus nipped in the bud any signs of violence.

Speaking on behalf of both party and Government Cde Maurice Nyagumbo has firmly taken the same position: anyone tempted to take the law into their own hands could expect to be severely dealt with, he said.

We join him in urging calm. Let there be no repetition of yesterday's disgraceful scenes.