

S African Comment on Machel Crash and Accusations of Involvement

(a) Johannesburg in English for abroad 1500 gmt 21 Oct 86

Text of commentary:

Such is the obsessive hatred of South Africa in the outside world that the worst is always suspected and the country is regarded as incapable of anything commendable. So it is that without a shred of evidence South Africa is suspected in various circles of having brought down the aircraft in which Mozambican President Samora Machel and 28 others were killed on Sunday night.

From the evidence which is available at the moment however it seems clear that bad weather, pilot error and the aircraft's poor avionics were responsible for the crash. One of the survivors, who miraculously walked away unscathed from the devastation, said that minutes before the crash he had heard the announcement that seat belts should be fastened in preparation for landing in Maputo. Swaziland's air controllers heard the pilot saying that he saw the lights of Maputo.

Experts at the scene of the crash said the aircraft's wheels were in a position which indicated that they had been lowered for landing. Clearly whatever lights the pilot may have seen they were not those of Maputo, which is about 70 km from the crash site just inside the border of South Africa. South African and Mozambican authorities agree that the aircraft was far off course and had been flying in extremely bad weather on its way from Lusaka in Zambia, to Maputo.

There are those however, including the plane's Russian pilot, who claim it was shot down. There is no doubt whatsoever that if the plane had been shot down this will be clearly shown by the investigation. The crash is being investigated not only by the South African Department of Transport but also by Mozambican officials. In addition the investigation has been thrown open by President P.W. Botha to the International Civil Aviation Association [as heard - Organisation]. This is hardly the action of a government which had in any way been responsible for the disaster.

South Africa, like the rest of the world, eagerly awaits the outcome of the investigation, secure in the knowledge that it would be totally absolved of any blame for this tragic accident.

(b) Johannesburg home service in English 0500 gmt 22 Oct 86

Text of commentary:

The South African authorities are going out of their way to ensure that all aspects of the investigation of the plane crash that killed President Machel of Mozambique are not only openly and correctly handled, but are seen by the world to be so. It is a very necessary precaution. In the present near-hysteria in the international

climate this country has become a legitimate target for the most far-fetched accusations. In preparing to deal with the real threats that already exist, it must needs also be on the alert for new ones that may be created out of the fabrications of its obsessed opponents.

That there are individuals and groups who see in the death of the Mozambique President another opportunity for pursuing their campaign became clear within hours of the accident. As expected the ANC and PAC reacted almost immediately by accusing South Africa of murder. At this stage virtually all that was known was that the aircraft had crashed, killing a number of passengers, including Mr Machel. But ignorance proved no obstacle. Dr Nthato Motlana, chairman of Soweto's Committee of Ten, also lost no time in telling an American television audience that Mr Machel had been murdered. The UDF claimed there were reasonable grounds - unspecified - for presuming South African involvement in the crash. In London the BBC gave such people extensive air time, evident evidently regarding their hostile accusations as too useful to be overridden by the fact that they were completely uninformed. And Commonwealth Secretary General Sir Sonny Ramphal gave it as his opinion that those who died were casualties of South Africa's policies of destabilisation.

There will certainly be those who will stick to their accusations regardless of the outcome of an inquiry. The circumstances of the tragedy provide much too valuable a weapon against South Africa for them to be put off by facts and trying to get through to them would be a waste of time. But it is important to get through to the more rational part of the world. It is important that the campaigners should not be given a propaganda coup by default - that the lie should not be enabled to overwhelm the truth simply because the truth is not sufficiently exposed.

Hence the lengths to which the South African authorities are going to ensure a completely open investigation. Mozambican government representatives were given every assistance in travelling to the scene of the accident and the media had almost unrestricted access. The flight control box - indispensable for the official inquiry - was sealed in the presence of South African and Mozambican representatives. All information was released as soon as it became available. As for the official inquiry itself, the South African government has invited Mozambique as well as international aviation experts to be represented in it.

At this stage the precise cause of the tragedy is not known. The aircraft was far off course and various reports refer to the weather conditions, faulty navigation instruments and pilot error. The truth must be established in the inquiry that now follows - to emerge clear and indisputable.