

New SA horror

AFRICA yesterday bade farewell to one of its greatest sons: Cde Samora Machel.

The Mozambican President was laid to rest with all the pomp and pageantry due to an outstanding revolutionary, leader and statesman.

While Africa's leaders paid final tribute to the patriot who gave his life to the liberation cause, the continent grieved . . . and felt anger too; an anger that mounts daily as more and more evidence points to South Africa's heavy involvement in the air crash in which the leader died.

Even as Africa's leaders gathered for the funeral a new horror emerged: evidence that Cde Machel was still alive up to four hours after the crash.

The Durban-based mass circulation newspaper *Ilanga* quoted eye-witness accounts from villagers living close to the crash scene who arrived within minutes of the plane coming down but were driven off by South African police.

There will, of course, be vehement denials from Pretoria. But given the Draconian controls under which the South African Press operates, no newspaper would dare publish such a report without first checking and then double checking its authenticity.

The evidence is further strengthened when taken in conjunction with yesterday's account from a surviving cameraman that the South African police made no attempt to help the survivors and instead concentrated on collecting diplomatic bags and documents.

That President Machel was still breathing, as were others who also subsequently died, so long after the crash without a finger lifted to help is a piece of calculated callousness giving rise to feelings far transcending mere anger.

It would be normal to expect great confusion at the scene of an air crash, but here we have South African police moving determinedly among the wreckage looking for papers, a pre-occupation making it hard to escape the conclusion that they knew beforehand that the stricken aircraft was the presidential jet.

Indeed, the very first question put by the police to the surviving cameraman was: "Is this the Mozambican presidential plane?"

Given South Africa's known capability to lure aircraft off course with fake landing beacons, a tactic they have employed before, Pretoria's protestations of innocence have a decidedly hollow ring.

The reaction of any civilised society, which South Africa clearly is not, is to give priority to the dying and injured. Leaving them to suffer unattended is not only an act of unrivalled barbarity but a grievous breach of international aviation regulations.

The same regulations stipulate that on no account, particularly in the case of an aircraft of one country crashing in another, must the plane's cargo or the passengers' baggage be moved or tampered with. Furthermore, once those aboard have been taken care of the crash site must be sealed off awaiting the arrival of trained investigators.

South Africa stands indicted on many counts, but the bitterest of all charges is that Cde Machel as well as many more members of his entourage might still be alive today had they not been callously denied help at the scene.