
Mozambican Reaction to Pik Botha's Remarks on Causes of Machel Plane Crash

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Excerpt from dispatch datelined Maputo, 2nd November (ME/8406/B/5):

Mozambican aviation expert has categorically denied South African Foreign Minister Roelof Botha's claim that the equipment on board President Samora Machel's ill-fated Tupolev-134 aircraft was "dated and obsolete". The aircraft, which crashed inside South Africa on 19th October killing Mozambican President Samora Machel and 33 others, had been manufactured in 1980 to the specifications of the Mozambican government for use on president flights.

A Mozambican aviation expert contacted by the Mozambican news agency (AIM) said that the aircraft "carried electronic equipment of the current generation, using integrated circuits, and with a design improved and updated for this technology". The expert, who spoke on condition he was not named, was replying to allegations made by Roelof Botha on Saturday [1st November]. The South African minister had spoken of "obsolete" equipment and claimed that the plane was not equipped "with an automatic ground proximity warning system to warn pilots should they descend below a certain altitude".

The expert rejected these claims "categorically". Botha had also stated that the altimeter was set at zero. The expert told AIM that he did not know whether Botha was referring to the radio altimeter or to pneumatic altimeters. "The radio altimeter stops functioning once there is a cut in the power supply," he said, "so it would naturally revert to zero."

Botha also said that Mozambican authorities had launched their search for the stricken aircraft out to sea when [words indistinct] the scheduled time. AIM has contacted people involved in the search, who state that they looked for the plane both at land and at sea. A search of this nature would normally be made over a large area both to the left and to the right of the presumed flight path.

Some of the statements made by Botha are based on technical data regarding the crash. This is the fifth press conference or interview that Botha has given on the matter. "The premature release of technical details, apart from violating the ethics which all

parties to the international enquiry should observe, feeds all kinds of speculations about the causes of the crash", a member of the Mozambican national commission of inquiry - which is also taking part in the international commission - told AIM. . .