

Pretoria 'tried to recruit survivor'

Maputo: A Mozambican official has said South Africa tried to recruit him to a rightwing guerrilla group fighting his own government after he survived the plane crash which killed President Samora Machel.

A protocol official, Mr Vasco Langa, made the allegation after his return to Maputo on October 30 after treatment in hospital in South Africa, just inside whose border the aircraft crashed on October 19.

Interrogators also tried to persuade him to say the Soviet crew of the plane had been drunk, he added. South Africa has alleged it found alcohol in the crew's blood. "I told them it wasn't true," he said.

He gave his account to Mozambican leaders before being taken to the Soviet Union five days ago for more medical treatment. A tape recording of the conversation was made available yesterday.

Mr Langa said interrogators at Nelspruit Hospital "asked me why I was travelling with Samora." He said he was frightened and told them he was a Mozambican student in Zambia who was offered a ride

But they knew his real identity and asked him to join the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) guerrillas, also known as Renamo. He said they asked him: "Don't you know that Renamo is advancing and capturing important positions?"

He said they added: "You're badly injured. We guarantee that in two weeks you'll have operations and intensive care. We'll take you to Pretoria where you'll study and we want you to join the group that's working to liberate Mozambique."

Thirty-three other officials travelling home with President Machel from Zambia died when the presidential plane crashed, moments before it was due to land in Maputo.

When the plane hit the ground Mr Langa said he passed out for a few minutes and when he recovered "men armed with pistols were climbing over the bodies."

He said they were gathering documents and asked: "Where is Samora?" Black African governments have accused South Africa of involvement in the crash. Pretoria denies the charge and has set up an investigation.—Reuter.