

## **Mozambique Disputes S African Claims on Machel Flight**

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Text of dispatch by AIM correspondent Paul Fauvet on "South African statements" on Machel's plane crash:

The latest South African explanation of why its air traffic control system did not warn the pilot of President Samora Machel's plane of danger was that the Tupulev-134 was flying below the radar's horizon. In other words, the plane had descended so low that it became invisible on South African radar screens. The South African authorities probably made these comments in reply to a recent AIM article which explained in detail the sophistication of its radar system.

AIM's investigation of the capacity of South African radar is based almost exclusively on South African publications to which any South African journalist can have easy access. We can now prove, according to exceptionally well-informed South African sources, that the South African radar horizon does not seem to be very much above sea level. The South Africans have a radar system along the border that is specifically designed to detect planes flying at low altitude. Our source for this information is none other than South African Foreign Minister Roelof Botha, who publicly praised the system's capacity in March 1985. This is how the Johannesburg 'Sunday Times' newspaper on 17th March 1985 quoted Minister Botha: Botha said that South Africa had just placed a low altitude radar system along the border with Mozambique. It has been operational since 11th March. He said that this was done to detect planes flying at low altitude which the Mozambican authorities claim have been penetrating their airspace from South Africa without identification or filed flight plans.

During the first few days that the new system was in operation, three illegal flights were detected. One of the flights went from South Africa to Mozambique. Another left Swaziland for eastern Transvaal. The third, flying a zigzag pattern at low altitude, was detected over Kruger park before entering Mozambique, where it landed at Inhaca island, having returned via the same route. In other words, the South African radar system allows perfect visibility along the entire border areas where President Samora Machel's plane crashed. What is more, if Botha was able to confide that a plane had landed at Inhaca, a Mozambican island whose airport is almost at sea level, then this system has no problem with its horizon. When President Samora Machel's Tupolev crashed it was flying at 900 metres above sea level.

A few days after Botha's statement on planes flying at low altitude, South African Defence Minister Gen Magnus Malan declared the entire eastern Transvaal border a restricted zone closed to flights. He added that all additional technological means were being used to ensure its effectiveness. South African Air Force Chief Lt-Gen Denis Earp announced that all pilots needed official permission to overfly this area, which extends from the Limpopo river to the border with Swaziland. This includes the Mbuluzi area where President Samora Machel died. Earp's statements were made public and widely publicised by the South African pro-government newspaper, 'The Citizen', on 21st March 1985.

His statement included a detailed description of the restricted area. It said: The restricted area, 78 km west of the Limpopo river and extending from the northern to the southern borders of the Kruger National Park, becomes part of the area promulgated under the terms of Law 79 of the Defence Act as a special and restricted area. The area covered is from Ressano Garcia south along the border between South Africa and Mozambique to that of Swaziland; from there west along the border between the Republic of South Africa and Swaziland; and finally from that area to the eastern border along the railway line to Ressano Garcia. To obtain authorisation to overfly this restricted area, pilots must contact the South African Air Force headquarters. All aircraft with authorisation or operating on the outskirts of this specific area are expected to establish radio contact with the government air traffic control stations on 119.0 MW. This was in the statement by General Earp.

Accordingly, President Samora Machel's Tupolev was overflying a special restricted area controlled by a radar system specially designed to operate at low altitudes. Even then no radio contact was made with its crew. The conclusion is logical: the Tupolev never disappeared from the radar screens. It was visible until the time it crashed.

If South African radar was able to identify Inhaca as the destination of one of the planes detected in March 1985, it could also identify Mbuluzi as the area of the Tupolev's crash. Therefore, it does not make sense that it was not until about 10 hours after the crash, at [time indistinct] the day after the crash, the South African authorities were able to send the first message to Mozambique informing it about the incident. What is more, the message gave an incorrect location for the crash, saying that it was in Natal when as a matter of fact it was in eastern Transvaal.

[Note: At 1700 gmt on 29th November Maputo home service in Portuguese reported: (Text) A South African citizen resident in the Kangwane bantustan has told

AIM that on the day on which President Machel died, 19th October, there was - and we quote - a heavy military presence in the Mbuzini area. The citizen, who spoke on condition that his name would not be revealed so that he could avoid reprisals by the Pretoria authorities, said that on the day in question Mbuzini residents saw both covered and open military vehicles which were normally used for patrol activities in the area, unquote. Under normal circumstances - and we continue to quote the citizen, the Mbuzini area is patrolled by South African military personnel, but on the day in question, 19th October, there was not only the normal patrol but an unusually heavy military presence and the number of soldiers was high, unquote.

The source said an ambulance arrived at Mbuzini at around midnight, but the driver had been ordered by the police not to take the vehicle to the scene of the plane crash. The citizen also confirmed that the survivors did not receive any assistance until the morning of the following day and that South African military personnel and police spent the night searching the crashed plane. He added that Mbuzini residents had approached the scene of the plane crash, but had been dispersed by police. This was revealed by a Mbuzini resident who unfurled an umbrella to protect the (?body) of Samora Machel when it started raining.]