

THEIR HERO'S LAST RETURN

Saan's Jose Caetano was the only foreign journalist present at Maputo airport when the body of Samora Machel was brought back to Mozambique. His report is exclusive to the *FM*.

The atmosphere at Maputo international airport on Monday afternoon was one of heavy emotion as the Air Force helicopter transporting the high-level Mozambican delegation, which had flown to SA to inspect the site of the crash, landed.

Hundreds of airport and civil aviation workers, as well as officers of the Mozambique Defence Force, crowded into the airport.

They watched in silence as the delegation led by Colonel Sergio Vieira, Minister of Security, stepped onto the tarmac at 3.55 pm.

Among members of the delegation were Major General Hama Thai, Chief of the Air Force, and the Deputy Ministers of the Interior and Health, Hipolito Patricio and Dr Fernando Vaz, respectively.

A murmur of awe rose from the crowd

when a barefoot survivor of the crash emerged from the helicopter wearing hospital pyjamas and a robe.

He was Captain Fernando Manuel Joao, Chief of President Samora Machel's personal guard who, apart from some heavy swelling on the side of his face and a cut at the back of his head, appeared otherwise unhurt.

In a brief exchange with journalists, the tall, powerfully built Joao said that he had been thrown clear of the aircraft at the moment of impact, and regained consciousness a short while later to find himself, still fastened to his seatbelt, in the middle of some bushes.

He had then walked for half an hour looking for help before he found some villagers who took him to a nearby mission station. It was through him that the news of the accident was passed to the world.

Shortly after the arrival of the helicopter, Mozambique PM Mario Machungo arrived at the airport, and after a brief consultation with Vieira was taken

aboard the helicopter where he was shown the body of the president, conveyed in a brown coffin. Minutes later a visibly moved Machungo stepped off the helicopter and waited on the tarmac for the president's body, as well as those of Minister of Transport Alcantara Santos and Professor Acquino de Braganza, Director of the Centre of African Studies at Maputo's Eduardo Mondlane University, to be loaded into three waiting ambulances, which drove in convoy with the PM's car at the rear.

Also at the airport were the Defence Minister and General of the Army Alberto Chipande and Deputy Defence Minister and Chief of Staff of the Mozambican Defence Force, Colonel General Sabastiao Mabote, who were accompanied by other generals of the Mozambican Defence Force.

Later in the evening the bodies of the other victims as well as some of the survivors were flown into the Mozambican capital aboard aircraft of the Mozambican Air Force.