Emotional reaction to Machel proposal

Graça Machel, former wife of the 1980s Mozambican president, was overcome on hearing the inquiry plan investigation by an appropriate structure” of the crash’s many outstanding questions. Mozambique has also formally requested a reopening of the inquest done by judge Cecil Margo in the 1980s. Margo cleared South African authorities of any wrongdoing.

At the time, Mozambican and Russian inquest members withdrew amid allegations of a South African cover-up and concluded that the crash was not an accident.

Dumisa Ntsebeza (SC), the former investigative head of the truth commission, welcomed the possible re-opening, stressing that “there was always a possibility that a false beam was used to lure the plane off course, while there was also a suggestion that people attempted to switch off the Maputo airports’ runway lights so that the false beam should be the only guide for landing”.

“But this must be thoroughly investigated as the truth commission had neither the time nor the wherewithal to do so,” Ntsebeza said.

“I will never forget how Graça Machel broke down when we called her to testify about the event that led to her [first] husband’s death and how utterly frustrated she was that there has not been movement on that case.

“I think the non-resolution of the case, as the president referred to it, is something that decided her against continuing a political life after spending years as minister of education. At least South Africans owe it to the wife of [Nelson] Mandela to investigate after so many allegations of involvement.”

Hpolipo Patricio, Mozambique’s ambassador to South Africa, called Mbeki’s remarks “a very positive statement” about an issue that his government had tried to get clarity on.

“It is a very emotional issue,” said Patricio, who was Machel’s deputy home affairs minister at the time of his death.

“We are pleased that with the marking of 20 years of the death of the father of our
nation there is renewed commitment not to let the issue rest.

"Mozambique will work with South Africa to try and get the answers."

Shortly after the truth commission’s call for a reopening of the Machel plane crash, a team was appointed to re-investigate the matter, but the issue was shelved after an initial probe failed to shed any new light on the case.

Other pressing cases were usurping the NPA’s scarce resources.

If the NPA decides to take up Mbeki’s suggestion, the matter is likely to be pursued by its priority crimes unit, which was tasked with prosecuting apartheid-era crimes by those who did not come clean before the truth commission. It already has its hands full with 15 investigations and five pending prosecutions, as Vusi Pikoli, the NPA head, indicated last month.

In addition, the future of its super investigative unit, the Scorpions, is still in the balance. Against all expectations, Mbeki on Friday failed to reveal the outcome of the Khumalo Commission, which was appointed to investigate whether the unit should be re-incorporated into the police.