TRC called for further investigation

KATHARINE CHILD

The TRC inquiry into the Samora Machel plane crash ended without clear answers and a recommendation that further investigation be attempted.

The inquiry, which began in 1998, found that “had there not been an intention to bring the aircraft down, the South African authorities could have prevented the incident.”

The TRC said it could not rule out the possibility of a false beacon directing the aircraft off course before it crashed into mountains at Mbozini, near Komatipoort. Machel was returning from a Lusaka summit.

Twenty-five people were killed.

The report said that, though the aircraft was monitored, and had entered military airspace and was off course, it was not contacted by the authorities.

The TRC findings did not support the conclusion of the Margo commission, which blamed pilot error for the crash.

It found that “circumstantial evidence collected, however, questioned the conclusion reached by the Margo commission.”

The TRC heard testimony by Machel’s wife, Graca, who “confirmed assassination attempts” had been made on her husband and that there had been attacks on their homes.

The TRC report said a large number of South African Defence Force members had gathered at Komatipoort the night before the accident for a braai. Many of them went to the crash site the next day.

At the site, Foreign Minister Pik Botha expressed sadness at Machel’s death.

The crash happened after “cabinet [recorded] that tensions between the two countries [South Africa and Mozambique] were increasing.”

Botha admitted to the TRC that documents had been removed from the scene of the crash.