

African martyr ^{H 361021}

THE death of President Samora Machel is a loss to all progressive mankind which words alone cannot adequately express.

Samora Machel was a staunch freedom fighter and it is a tragic irony that he met his death while trying to further the cause of freedom and justice for those in the region who still languish under oppressive white minority rule.

For more than two decades Cde Machel was involved in the armed struggle in Southern Africa, first leading Mozambique's own war against Portuguese colonialism. Secondly he supported Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, and it might be said that without this assistance the independence of this country would have been a different story altogether.

More recently he led his country in a struggle against South African-backed forces seeking to overthrow his government, and was involved with other regional leaders in the fight against apartheid.

The tragedy in which Cde Machel and some members of his government perished comes after persistent reports that the Mozambique leader had been singled out by the South Africans for assassination.

Here the sinister significance of South African Defence Minister Magnus Malan's threat to "act accordingly" if Cde Machel allegedly continued to pursue "terrorism and revolution" cannot be overlooked.

In the light of Malan's and other threats by the Botha regime, the fact that the presidential aircraft exceeded its destination and then crashed inside South Africa cannot be treated simply as coincidence.

It cannot be coincidence either that the crash should have occurred while President Machel was returning from a mission directly linked with efforts to end that cruel, heartless system of apartheid: a meeting with the leaders of Zambia, Zaire and Angola to try to get Zaire to stop supporting South African-backed bandits in Angola.

Therefore, despite all the denials — and Pretoria would hardly admit its guilt — the most likely cause of the crash remains a direct South African attack on the presidential plane.

But even in the unlikely event of Pretoria having no hand in the tragedy, President Machel is a casualty of apartheid as surely as if his plane had been hit by South African missiles, shells or bullets.

Pretoria's expressions of regret at President Machel's untimely passing fool no one. The Mozambican leader, as is clear from Malan's threats, had become an increasingly sharp and painful thorn in South Africa's side.

President Machel's death is bound to increase tension and nothing would please Pretoria more than the excuse to step up cross-border hostilities. Mozambicans and their brothers and sisters in Southern Africa ought to remain solidly united against apartheid.

Samora Machel is dead but the struggle goes on. It is a struggle that has already claimed many martyrs, and Machel will be remembered as being among the greatest of them.