

COMMENT

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Death of a hero

THE laying to rest today of President Samora Machel is as much an occasion for grief at the loss of a hero of African liberation as an opportunity for rededication to that cause.

The gathering of the continent's leaders at the Mozambican leader's graveside is a symbolic reaffirmation of black solidarity and burning determination to see all of Africa's people free.

The leaders mourn. The masses mourn. And together they vow to join the selfless crusade to crush apartheid.

That the battle will be protracted and bloody is of little doubt. The preliminary skirmishes have provided ample evidence of South Africa's determination to go down fighting.

And that same stubborn preference for a final blood-letting rather than dismantling apartheid and clearing the way for rapid, meaningful change, could well have had a hand in Cde Machel's death.

The extent of Pretoria's involvement in the tragic air crash in which the Mozambican leader perished will only emerge with the findings of the international commission of inquiry, but involved, in one way or another, it most certainly is.

Given the regime's track record for disinformation and dirty tricks the commission will need to keep its eyes open and sift the evidence with special care. Indeed, it is well within the realms of possibility that the evidence has been tampered with already.

No long, bloody conflict worth the winning is ever won without sacrifice.

Cde Machel, a leader long in the forefront of the struggle, has made the ultimate sacrifice: he has given his life. But in giving it he spurs the rest of us, as individuals, as a nation and as a united Africa to redouble our efforts, no matter at what cost, to overthrow apartheid.

A great deal of that effort must be directed at developing and securing the Beira Corridor, the vital link to the sea on which so much will depend once the South Africans start to feel sanctions bite. The success of the project was of very special concern to Cde Machel.

Renewing our resolve to fight all the more fiercely to end evil apartheid is our most certain way of keeping forever fresh the memory of a man who laid down his life so that others might one day be free.