

PRETORIA May 13 1998 - SAPA

BOMBING VICTIM WILL NOT OPPOSE AMNESTY

A victim of the 1983 Church Street bomb in Pretoria told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Wednesday he would not oppose the amnesty applications of those responsible for his injuries.

Louis Jacobus Pretorius told the commission he broke his back trying to flee air force headquarters after the Umkontho we Sizwe (MK) bomb exploded outside the building. MK was the armed wing of the African National Congress.

Pretorius slipped on bloody stairs, and had to have three operations. He was declared medically unfit in 1993, and is unemployed.

"As a human being I would like to object to the amnesty applications, but my Christian principles tell me I should not," Pretorius said.

"If I want forgiveness from God, then I must also forgive."

Although it was relatively easy to forgive, he said, it was extremely hard to forget. "How am I supposed to forget when I live in pain every day?"

Pretorius, 37, said he was at the time building a distinguished career in the administration section of the joint air force support centre.

"It often gets to me because I know what potential I had in the air force," he said. Since his fall he has been unable to sit, stand, or walk for extended periods.

Pretorius said he was busy on the telephone when he heard the explosion.

"I looked out of the window, there were people and limbs lying around. It is not a sight I want to see again."

Pretorius said he did not believe the attack had been aimed at an exclusive military target. A car packed with explosives detonated in the Pretoria city centre on May 20, 1983.

The blast killed 21 people, including the two bombers, and injured 217 others.

Aboobaker Ismail, dubbed MK's "master bomber", earlier told the TRC the attack was aimed at a military target, and it was not ANC policy to attack civilians. He denied it was racially motivated.

"We were at war," Ismail said. "Did the apartheid forces think they were fighting a war against people that will not fight back?"

Ismail is seeking amnesty for several bombings.