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ANC master bomber 'proud of cadres'

THE man who masterminded the African National Congress bombing campaign in South Africa in the 1980s told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Pretoria he felt proud of the cadres who carried out attacks under his command.

The former head of the Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) special operations unit, Aboobaker Ismail, yesterday told the TRC's amnesty committee in Pretoria he took full responsibility for the ANC's bombing campaign between 1980 and 1987.

Mr Ismail, 43, is one of 10 former MK members applying for amnesty for a series of attacks including bomb blasts in Church Street in Pretoria, the Krugersdorp Magistrate's Court and Wits Command in Johannesburg.

Mr Ismail has admitted planning and carrying out the attacks as part of the ANC's strategy to demoralise the apartheid government economically and militarily.

He said the Church Street bomb blast on May 20, 1983, had been aimed at the military personnel leaving the SA Air Force headquarters.

"Our intention was to show the government that their military forces were not invincible and could also be subjected to attack," Mr Ismail said, adding that 11 of the 19 fatalities in the blast were SAAF officers.

He said a rocket attack on the Voortrekkerhoogte military base on August 12, 1981 had a similar effect.

"This type of armed propaganda was aimed at showing the oppressed that the enemy was not invincible and that the ANC

had the ability to strike at the heart of the apartheid war machine," Mr Ismail said.

Mr Ismail left the country in 1977 to join MK, and became an instructor. When MK was disbanded in 1993 he joined the SANDF and is presently the chief of policy and planning in the Department of Defence.

He told the committee he was proud of the bravery, discipline and selfless sacrifices of the cadres who had taken the fight to the apartheid government against extreme odds.

"Many of them laid down their lives in the pursuit of freedom for all in South Africa. They worked in the one of the most difficult and dangerous arenas of struggle for a non-racial and democratic South Africa," Mr Ismail said.

He said MK cadres

faceted summary execution or were tortured to death or sentenced to hanging or lengthy terms of imprisonment.

Mr Ismail said he regretted the killing of innocent civilians who the ANC had never set out to deliberately attack. He said he also regretted the death of many MK cadres and innocent civilians killed by South African security forces.

Mr Ismail said the bomb attacks were carried out to inspire the oppressed and to create an atmosphere of ungovernability in the country.

He also listed attacks against strategic targets in an effort to weaken the country economically.

Among these were attacks on the Sasol plant and the Mobil and Natref oil refineries in 1980. He said the attacks using Russian-made rockets had

been highly successful and had received the praise of the then ANC president, Oliver Tambo.

He said in retaliation, the SANDF attacked the Matola residential area in Maputo and killed 13 ANC cadres and kidnapped four others. Among them were many of the cadres who had carried out the attack on the oil installations.

Mr Ismail has admitted giving tacit approval for the Magoo's bar bomb blast in Durban in June 1986, for which Robert McBride was convicted and sentenced to death. Mr Ismail said although he did not select the bar as a target, it had been an official MK operation. He said according to ANC surveillance the bar was frequented by off-duty security force members and was therefore a legitimate target. - Sapa.

TREFWOORDE

- 1 *Soldate*
- 2 *Wondlento We*
- 3 *Sejwe getueneris*
- 4 *Amnestie*
- 5 *Pretoria*
- 6 *Wolfskop*
- 7 *Samandloffing*
- 8 *Wit-*
Opheer
- 9
- 10