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MCBRIDE APOLOGISES TO FAMILY OF THOSE SLAIN IN ARMED STRUGGLE

Former Umkhonto we Sizwe commander and now Foreign Affairs director Robert McBride on Tuesday apologised to the relatives of those killed during operations by the African National Congress' special operations unit in and around Durban during the early '80s. McBride was testifying in his amnesty application for a number of bombing incidents in and around the city between 1981 and 1986. In one of the incidents, McBride planted a bomb outside the Magoos bar and the Why Not bar on the Durban beachfront.

Civilians Angelique Pattenden, Julie van der Linde and Marchelle Gerrard were killed. Seventy-three other civilians were wounded when the 60kg bomb went off on the night of June 14, 1986. In another incident, Mlungisi Buthelezi was shot dead when McBride and five others, including his father Derrick, helped fellow operative Gordon Webster escape from the Edendale hospital near Pietermaritzburg on May 4, 1986.

Webster was under police guard after being wounded by police when he was arrested the previous month. Buthelezi was killed and two of his friends wounded while they were waiting for Buthelezi's mother, who was a nurse. In testifying before the committee in Durban on Tuesday, McBride said he was "truly sorry" for those who were wounded and killed. He said he had nothing personal against the victims who had died in his quest for freedom from the shackles of the apartheid system.

McBride previously stated that the targets, in what became known as the Magoos bar car bomb, were security force personnel who frequented the adjacent Why Not establishment. The target was selected after intelligence gathered confirmed it was a popular bar among soldiers and policemen, McBride said. This was after it was decided not to target the nearby military Natal Command headquarters because it was not possible to park a car outside the premises. Webster was at the time the commander of the unit which was to carry out the attack.

McBride said the purpose of the operation was to commemorate the raid on the Botswana capital on 14 June, 1985 in which 12 people, including ANC members, were killed by the security forces. It was also to commemorate the June 16 student uprising in 1976 in which scores of youth were killed by soldiers and policemen. "It was also intended as an operation of taking the struggle into the white areas as per ANC policy," McBride added. Before the attack could be carried out, Webster was shot and wounded and McBride took over the command of the unit.

McBride said reconnaissance of the Why Not bar by Webster, who had concluded that the place was "infested with police", had convinced him that it was legitimate target. This

information was conveyed to the sub command in Botswana and he was instructed to go ahead with the bombing, McBride said.

He added he had raised concerns over civilian casualties but was told by the commander of the special operations unit Aboobaker Ismail that in terms of the Kabwe conference and policy changes in the ANC that civilian casualties were a secondary consideration and that the main concern was to target military personnel. "The only equivocation given to me was that there should be absolutely no chance of children being killed in the operation," McBride said in his testimony.

McBride held these discussion with Ismail in Botswana from where he also brought the explosives for the bomb. He said on the night of the attack he was assisted by Matthew Lecordier and Greta Appelgren who were unaware of the specifics of the operation. McBride said he purchased a vehicle under a false name in which he packed the explosives, comprising SZ6 charges, in the boot of the car. Explaining the construction of the bomb, McBride said: "As per instructions, detonators were added into all the SZ6 charges so as to give the explosion a greater impact. "Also as per instructions, I added shrapnel to the explosive charges.

This I was able to get from for example cutting old burglar guards in my father's workshop and placing it amongst the shrapnel." McBride said this was in accordance with his instructions on how to make a car bomb. On the night of the attack McBride, Lecordier and Appelgren travelled to Durban in two vehicles. The one with the bomb was parked in West Street and the three of them drove in the other vehicle to the beachfront bars to establish if any roadblocks had been erected along the way. McBride said after he was satisfied there was no undue police activity or roadblocks he returned to fetch the car in West Street.

Appelgren in the meantime secured a parking for him outside the bar by parking the other vehicle in a location pointed out by McBride. Appelgren was then instructed to move out of the parking space and McBride parked the blue Ford Cortina with the explosives in the boot, in the most appropriate location, McBride said. After activating the explosives, McBride, Lecordier and Appelgren then drove off in the other car. McBride also testified of his involvement in a number of bombings of electrical sub-stations around Durban in 1986. One of the explosions at the Wentworth sub-station outside Durban on January 9, 1986 killed security branch policeman Colonel Robert Welman. McBride said in most of these incidents he was not charged nor convicted but was seeking amnesty for them in terms of full disclosure. Cross-questioning of McBride by legal counsel representing the victims was expected to commence on Wednesday.