

DURBAN 27 September 1999 - SAPA

FUEL REFINERIES STRATEGIC TARGETS FOR ANC IN 80S, TRC HEARS

The African National Congress' special operations unit had identified fuel refineries as strategic targets in the eighties as part of a strategy to bring the former government to its knees, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission heard on Monday. By targeting fuel refineries they hoped to stop the former government from operating effectively, unit commander Aboobaker Ismail told the TRC's amnesty committee at the Durban Christian Centre. He was referring to the attack on the Mobil refinery in 1984. Ismail is one of nine former operatives of Umkhonto we Sizwe (the now defunct armed wing of the ANC) applying for amnesty in connection with a number of incidents in Durban and surrounding areas between 1981 and 1986. The applications will also deal with the Magoos bar bombing by Robert McBride in June 1986, as well as an explosion at the Jacobs electrical sub-station in January 1986. Ismail said as commander of the unit he accepted responsibility for its operations but was not personally involved in all of them. With regard to the bombing of the Magoos bar on the Durban beachfront in which three revellers died and 73 were injured, Ismail said the attack was carried out in a time of extreme political upheaval in South Africa. The attack was carried out to commemorate the 1976 June uprising in Soweto in which police shot dead scores of youths. It was also to commemorate the first anniversary of the June 14 raid in Gaborone in 1985, Ismail said. The actual target in what has become known as the Magoos bar bombing, was the nearby Why Not bar where apparently most of the casualties occurred. In his affidavit Ismail said: "The attack on the Why Not was in line with the ANC's attempts to take the struggle out of the black ghettos and into the white areas." McBride was expected to testify in detail in his amnesty application for his role in the Magoos bar bombing.