

DURBAN 27 September 1999 - SAPA

MAGOOS BOMB MEANT FOR SECURITY PERSONNEL: TRC

The 1986 Magoos bar car bomb which killed three people and wounded 73 others on the Durban beachfront in 1986 was intended for apartheid security force personnel who frequented the establishments, the Truth and Reconciliation's amnesty committee heard on Monday. The bomb was planted by Robert McBride, who was at the time a unit commander of the African National Congress' special operations unit under the command of Aboobaker Ismail. McBride received three death sentences for the bombing but was given a reprieve when the ANC demanded an end to political executions as a precondition to negotiations with the National Party government, almost 10 years ago. McBride is currently a director in the Department of Foreign Affairs and is applying for amnesty for the bombing. In applying for amnesty for a number of incidents in and around Durban between 1981 and 1986, Ismail told the committee he accepted political responsibility for all the acts committed by former ANC operatives under his command. Ismail and McBride are among nine former Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) operatives applying for amnesty for these incidents at the Durban Christian Centre. In his testimony on Monday, Ismail said the Magoos bar bombing was to commemorate the June 16, 1976 uprising which began in Soweto, and in which hundreds of youths were shot dead by police countrywide. It was also to commemorate the June 14 raid on the Botswana capital, Gaborone in 1985 in which 12 people, including a six-year-old child died. Ismail said that during discussions with McBride in June 1986 they had talked about the possibility of carrying out an attack on the Natal Command military base on the Durban beachfront. McBride told him that security around the base had been stepped up. McBride was then instructed to identify other areas with high concentrations of "enemy personnel", whether they were on duty or not. Ismail said McBride raised the possibility of civilian casualties and was then referred to a decision taken at the Kabwe conference in June 1985, where it was decided that civilian casualties should not stand in the way of executing the struggle against apartheid. McBride then informed Ismail that a number of possible targets had been identified which were frequented by off-duty security force members. Ismail said he instructed McBride to select a final target after further reconnaissance and to proceed with the operation. He said McBride was instructed in the construction of a car bomb and was supplied with the appropriate material, which McBride then brought into South Africa from Botswana. McBride was expected to testify in detail about events leading to the bombing after Ismail's testimony. Advocate Tony Richards, acting on behalf of the victims, questioned Ismail extensively over what constituted a legitimate target. Ismail said it was policy that while civilian casualties should be limited, they should not stand in the way of further operations. Ismail also testified on his role in the May 1984 attack on the Mobil refinery, the explosion at the Jacob's electrical sub-station in January 1986, and the escape from hospital of operative Gordon Webster in May 1986. Ismail said he did not know what had actually occurred during the attack on the Mobil refinery but had gathered from newspaper reports that RPG rockets had been used. All the operatives involved in the operation died. Ismail said he had recruited Webster into the special operations unit and Webster was sent on a course in Angola. He returned towards the end of 1985. "Comrade Gordon was instructed to strike at transformer sub-stations including power lines in the power network, to carry out operations against other strategic targets such as oil refineries, fuel depots and government

infrastructure, and to carry out attacks on enemy personnel," Ismail said. This was decided on to hamper the former government's ability to function properly. Ismail said McBride was recruited into the special operations unit by Webster, who was then a unit commander, and was sent on a crash training course in Gaborone, Botswana. When he returned he joined Webster's unit, which carried out several operations. "The specific targets were not chosen by special operations command. The unit operated with a measure of autonomy and discretion within the ambit of the policies and guidelines of the ANC. The unit commander and the operatives on the ground had authority to decide upon each target," Ismail said. His testimony continues on Tuesday.