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INTELLIGENCE ON MAGOOS NOT SUFFICIENT: ISMAIL

Intelligence which led to the bombing of the Magoos bar and the Why Not bar on the Durban beachfront in 1986 in which three civilians were killed might have been insufficient to warrant the attack, the commander of the ANC's former special operations unit said on Thursday. Aboobaker Ismail, addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's amnesty committee in Durban, conceded that intelligence which indicated that the bars were frequented by security force personnel was not tested by him. Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) operative and a unit commander of the special operations unit, Robert McBride, planted the bomb which killed three civilians and wounded 73 others. McBride is now foreign affairs director. The establishments were chosen based on intelligence that they were frequented by security force personnel, McBride said. He said he gleaned some of the intelligence from his colleague, Gordon Webster, who told him the place was "infested" with policemen. Ismail said he sanctioned the attack after McBride briefed him about the operation and told him it was a venue with a large concentration of security personnel. This was in line with the ANC's policy at the time to target large concentrations of soldiers and policemen, irrespective of whether or not civilians would be killed or injured. McBride did not tell Ismail the target was a bar on Durban's popular beachfront. Ismail said had he known that, he might have instructed McBride to conduct more reconnaissance and to gather more information on the proposed target. However, he defended McBride's actions, saying McBride believed the venues were frequented by security personnel and based on that his actions were justified. In an emotional address to the public gallery, Ismail said the civilian loss of life was regrettable. "We may not have achieved our intended (security force) target and I say to the family and the victims, we are deeply sorry for that. "We never intended to strike at you. Our intention was to strike at those security force personnel who upheld the apartheid state." Ismail said the casualties were the result of a civil war brought about by a group of people who perceived themselves to be superior beings. "We had to get rid of that heinous enemy," Ismail said. He made an impassioned plea for all South Africans to work together for freedom and democracy and to oppose the supremacy of some over others. Loud applause erupted when Ismail concluded his testimony with an apology to all people who had lost loved ones and who had suffered during the armed struggle. McBride concluded his testimony on Thursday morning in connection with a number of bombing incidents in and around Durban between 1985 and 1986. The applications of another seven applicants are expected to be heard in connection with incidents in the greater Durban area between 1981 and 1986 which involved the ANC's special operations unit.
