

Plausible that 'attack or threat' led to crash that killed former UN chief Hammarskjöld – new report

25 October 2017 – A new United Nations-mandated report has found it “appears plausible” that an external attack or threat may have led to the fatal plane crash that killed former United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld.

António Guterres on Tuesday called on UN Member States to make available information concerning the 56-year-old incident. A [statement](#) issued his Spokesman said Mr. Guterres is of the view that the information made available to the UN to date has been insufficient and that it seems likely that important additional information exists.

The chartered DC6 plane registered as SE-BDY crashed just after midnight on 17-18 September 1961, near Ndola (then Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia), killing Mr. Hammarskjöld and 14 of the 15 members of the party accompanying him, with the sole survivor succumbing to injuries a few days later.

“There is a significant amount of evidence from eyewitnesses that they observed more than one aircraft in the air, that the other aircraft may have been a jet, that SE-BDY was on fire before it crashed, and/or that SE-BDY was fired upon or otherwise actively engaged by another aircraft,” noted Eminent Person Mohamed Chande Othman in his report, [transmitted](#) to the General Assembly Tuesday.

“It appears plausible that an external attack or threat may have been a cause of the crash, whether by way of a direct attack causing SE-BDY to crash or by causing a momentary distraction of the pilots. Such a distraction need only have taken away the pilots’ attention for a matter of seconds at the critical point at which they were in their descent to have been potentially fatal.”

Over the year, a series of inquiries have explored various hypotheses for the crash, including aerial or ground attack or other external threat (“external attack or threat”), sabotage, hijacking, and human error.

Conclusions of investigation

In the [report](#), the Eminent Person concluded that it is almost certain that Mr. Hammarskjöld and the members of his party were not assassinated after landing and that all passengers died from injuries sustained during the plane crash, either instantaneously or soon after.

Exploring whether a sabotage – possibly a bomb planted on the plane and activated before landing – led to the crash, “as part of a plot to ‘remove’ Hammarskjöld,” Mr. Othman reported that he attempted to obtain access from South Africa to the ‘Operation Celeste’ documents, which concern this claim, but at the time of writing his report, access to the documents had not been

granted.

Noting that in the time available, and in view of the emergence of new matters requiring further analysis of facts, he was not able to conclude all aspects of the work, the Eminent Person noted that it appears to him "reasonable to conclude that the burden of proof has now shifted to Member States" to show that they have conducted a full review of records and archives in their custody or possession, including those that remain classified, for potentially relevant information.

He also recommended that Member States appoint an independent and high-ranking official to conduct a dedicated and internal review of their archives, in particular, their intelligence, security and defence archives, with a view to ensuring comprehensive access to relevant information and establishing what happened on that fateful night.

"An incident such as this where one or more of the hypotheses of the air crash may have involved an adverse or hostile act or acts on the Secretary-General of the United Nations is a matter of highest public interest," he noted, urging for meaningful participation of key Member States in identifying material relevant to the tragic incident.

"This is a step that must be taken before this matter, and the memories of those who perished on flight SE-BDY in the service of the Organization, may rest," he concluded.