

UN Report Said to Show South African's Role in Arms

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How Ehlers sold arms to the Hutus

LEAKED details from an unpublished United Nations report confirm the role of Willem "Ters" Ehlers - former president PW Botha's last private secretary - in the arms build-up in war-racked Central Africa.

The recently completed third report of the UN commission investigating embargo-busting arms sales to Rwanda's defeated Hutu forces contains an admission by Ehlers that he was involved in a June 1994 arms consignment from the Seychelles to Goma, a Zairean provincial capital bordering Rwanda.

But Ehlers told the commission he had been under the impression the 80 tons of rifles, grenades and ammunition, worth well over R1- million, was destined for the Zairean armed forces, which would not have contravened the UN embargo.

The Washington-based Human

Rights Watch Arms Project, whose earlier revelations of the illicit arms flow to the region sparked the UN inquiry, this week called on the UN to release the report publicly. Said Arms Project director Joost Hiltermann: "Suppressing this essential report on the role of arms trafficking in Central Africa at exactly the moment when the region is going up in flames suggests that the Security Council is less interested in promoting international security than it is in covering its own failures."

The organisation said the unpublished UN report, dated October 28, concludes that "arms have continued to flow from or through South Africa, Angola, Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia, and Kinshasa, Zaire". The Arms Project said the international community had "enlarged" the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in the region by "supplying arms to, or failing to im-

pede the rearming of, the perpetrators of the 1994 [Rwanda] genocide”.

Exerpts of the UN report obtained by the Mail and Guardian repeat the finding that Ehlers, once seen as a likely future chief of the South African Navy but seconded to Botha’s office until Botha retired in 1989, was a broker in the arms consignment which appears to have ended up with the defeated Rwandan Hutu forces when they fled to Goma and other parts of eastern Zaire in mid-1994. These forces have been held responsible for the massacre of up to a million Rwandan Tutsis and Hutu moderates in the first half of 1994, and have again been central to the latest conflict in Eastern Zaire, where Goma has been a flashpoint.

The report says the UN commission interviewed Ehlers in Pretoria in September, where he corroborated earlier evidence gathered by the commission. But he told the commission he had believed the client had been the Zairean government, as the client’s representatives had been two Zaireans. The report pointed out, however, that the one, Jean-Bosco

Ruhorahoza, described himself first as Rwandan, and later as Zairean, in Seychelles immigration papers. It also pointed out that another member of the party which inspected the arms in the Seychelles with Ehlers before it was flown to Goma was Rwandan Colonel Theoneste Bagasore, who has since been arrested in Cameroon in connection with his alleged role in the genocide. Bagasora pretended in some documentation to be a Zairean functionary.

The commission’s second report, published in March 1996, appeared critical of the South African government for initially not having replied to requests for information on Ehlers and other apparent violations of the embargo implicating South Africa. But the latest report says the commission’s “various interlocutors” had told it that South Africa’s arms industry was “being brought under increasing government control. However, individuals who had been involved in the arms trade or the armed forces during the apartheid era were still active in an individual capacity or in private industry.”