

# Ehlers linked to flights in Namibia flightsy

Stefaans Brümmer

Mail and Guardian, March 8, 1996

SOUTH AFRICAN arms dealer Ters Ehlers - ex- President PW Botha's last private secretary - has been implicated in "unauthorised" flights of a Russian cargo aircraft between South Africa, Namibia and Angola.

Namibian Deputy Minister of Transport Klaus Dierks last Friday said his department had grounded the Russian-registered Antonov-12 in Grootfontein pending an investigation by police.

Dierks claimed the aircraft operator, said to be a Nelspruit-based Russian, had not complied with legislation to operate the aircraft from Namibia. He said Ehlers had approached him earlier to allow the aircraft to fly supplies to Angola, but he had told him to apply to the country's transport commission. The aircraft then started operating from Grootfontein without permission, Dierks charged.

When impounded last Friday, the Antonov was said to be taking on a

cargo of fuel for delivery in Angola. That country's Unita rebel movement is still embargoed by the United Nations from receiving arms or fuel.

Ehlers - who was charged last year by the United States-based Human Rights Watch to have supplied arms to Rwanda's defeated Hutu army in contravention of a UN embargo - this week acknowledged he had "applied to the ministry (of transport) for permission to operate out of Namibia", but denied the cargo on the intended flight from Grootfontein was his.

The Human Rights Watch claimed in a report last year that Colonel Theoneste Bagasora, a senior member of the Hutu military blamed for the genocide in Rwanda, had met South African officials in 1994 to arrange arms for his army, then already defeated and exiled in neighbouring Zaire. Bagasora was introduced to Ehlers, who allegedly flew two planeloads of weapons from the Seychelles to Goma, a Zairean town on the Rwanda border and site

of large Hutu refugee camps.

The United Nations Security Council is holding an inquiry into allegations that the defeated Hutus had been supplied with arms by countries and individuals including Ehlers. South Africa's Cameron Commission is also looking at the allegations.

Ehlers, a navy commodore tipped to be chief of the Navy before then-defence minister Magnus Malan seconded him to Botha, is known to have had dealings in the international arms market and to have close ties with senior African politicians.

Also closely connected to controversial Italian businessman Mario Chiavelli, Ehlers in 1990 became managing director of the South African branch of the Seychelles-based conglomerate GMR, which is widely held to have played a sanctions-busting role in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The South African branch of GMR was established in the mid-eighties by Craig Williamson, South African Police and later Defence Force "superspy".