

Carlos Cardoso murder trial update

12th December

Ballistics expert testifies

Maputo, 12 Dec (AIM) - A ballistics expert testified on Thursday at the Carlos Cardoso murder trial that, in his opinion, the man who fired the shots that killed Mozambique's top investigative journalist must have been experienced in handling firearms.

The confessed assassin, Carlitos Rashid, told the court in November that he had never fired a gun before he picked up the AK-47 used to murder Cardoso. He said he had fired it once at a deserted race track to check it was working, and then, about half an hour later, used it for the assassination.

Superintendent T.J. Brits, a chief forensic analyst in the ballistics unit of the South African police, gave it as his expert opinion that "the person who used this gun must have known it and fired it before".

He noted that three of the bullet holes in Cardoso's car, a Toyota Cressida, were very close together. "The AK-47 is a powerful rifle", he said. "It's not easy, on the first time of using it, to fire three shots like that".

The evidence also showed that the shots were well-aimed. "Although it is a basic gun, you must have some knowledge to use it", said Brits.

It was not until July 2001, eight months after the murder, that the South African police were asked to look at the five cartridges and three bullet fragments recovered from the crime scene, and at the car.

The report by Brits was critical of the forensic work of the Mozambican police and of the autopsy. He found that the police photographs of Cardoso's body were of such poor quality that "it was impossible to give an opinion of the wounds of the victim".

As for the autopsy, it had "various conflicting findings". It claimed, for example, that the shots were fired from left to right, but also stated that the bullet entry wounds were on the right frontal side of Cardoso's body, and the exit wounds on the left side.

From studying the damage to the car, Brits deduced that only five shots were fired. The autopsy claim that eight bullets struck Cardoso resulted from a confusion between the bullets and the "secondary projectiles" (i.e. bits of metal or glass) generated when the bullets smashed through the car on their way to their victim.

Brits said that one bullet had been fired through the windscreen, and it was possibly this bullet that struck Cardoso's driver, Carlos Manjate, in the head, severely injuring him.

A second bullet went through the right front pillar and window frame before striking Cardoso. It was probably this bullet that caused the massive injury to Cardoso's head.

The other three shots, fired closely together, presumably went through the open window. All three hit the left hand door, at least two of them hitting Cardoso first.

The spent cartridges revealed that all five bullets came from the same gun. Brits said there was no evidence that any other gun was used.

Both Rashid, and a second member of the death squad, Manuel Fernandes, claimed that the driver of the car, Anibal dos Santos Junior ("Anibalzinho"), fired a Makarov pistol in the air at the start of the ambush. But no pistol cartridge was found at the scene.

Brits said that all the shots had a downward trajectory. They had been fired at close range, but from two separate positions - which was consistent with either the shooter, or his target, or both being in motion. The evidence was thus consistent with the shots being fired from within a car that had pulled alongside the Toyota. He said that the AK-47 was probably on semi-automatic setting, firing one shot at a time. Had it been on fully automatic setting, the shots could not have been so well controlled.

The only other witness heard by the court on Thursday, Joao Rafael Chiboleque, a security guard at the Auto-Edil car park in central Maputo, testified that Anibalzinho rented three places in the park, and that in November he had parked a red Citi-Golf there.

The Citi-Golf was brought to Auto-Edil on 15 November 2000, and left on 19 November, three days before the murder.

A red Citi-Golf was used to transport the assassins, and the day after the murder was driven over the border, and left in South Africa. One thread in the prosecution case is to tie this car to Anibalzinho.

On Friday, the public trial is suspended while the judge, and the prosecution and defence lawyers, study a variety of audio and video tapes that have been submitted, notably by the former head of the Maputo Criminal Investigation Police (PIC), Antonio Frangoulis, who taped many of his interviews with the accused. It is not clear whether these will be admitted as evidence. The trial proper resumes on Monday.

Nyimpine Chissano told to stay at home

Maputo, 12 Dec (AIM) - Businessman Nyimpine Chissano, the oldest son of President Joaquim Chissano, has been advised to stay at home and keep calm, following the recent public animosity shown towards him, reports Thursday's issue of the weekly paper "Zambeze".

Three of those accused of murdering journalist Carlos Cardoso have claimed that Nyimpine Chissano was involved in ordering the killing. He was therefore called to testify at the Maputo City Court, where he denied all the accusations.

However, there has been no convincing explanation for how postdated cheques signed by Chissano Jr, totalling 1.29 billion meticaís (about 50,000 US dollars) came to be in the possession of one of the accused, Maputo money lender Momade Assife Abdul Satar).

Some of Chissano's remarks on the witness stand were less than wise - particularly his dismissal of one of the accused, Carlitos Rashid, as "a wretched individual", and his claim that critical articles by Cardoso affected the entire Chissano family, from his great-grandparents down to his one year old child (who was not born when Cardoso was murdered).

When Nyimpine Chissano and his wife, the actress Candida Bila, went shopping at the Maputo central market last Saturday, they were given a hostile reception. They were booed by market vendors and beat a hasty retreat.

"Zambeze" cites an unnamed relative of Nyimpine saying that he has been advised to keep calm and stay at home while the trial unfolds, so as to avoid any further public humiliation.

Some of the paper's sources say that the advice to keep a low profile was given even before he set foot in the court - but he disregarded it. After the incident in the Central Market, the pressure from his family, friends and lawyer has increased.

Nyimpine's lawyer, Orlando da Graca (who is a member of the National Council of the main opposition party, the former rebel movement Renamo), confirmed that he had suggested that his client keep calm and avoid being seen in public.

"Zambeze" also suggests that Nyimpine, his wife, and his business partner Apolinario Pateguana, are preparing to emigrate to South Africa. But the man allegedly dealing with their passports has point-blank denied the story.

Alfredo Mavila, the manager of Mozambique Travel Services, in Johannesburg, denied that he had received a passport from any of the trio.

He pointed out that even if they did send him their passports, he could not deal with them - for his company was set up specifically to help Mozambicans already living in South Africa who want to acquire the status of permanent resident.

"We only treat cases of people who can prove that they have lived in South Africa for more than five years", he said. Since Nyimpine Chissano does not live in South Africa, there was no way Mozambique Travel Services would process a request from him, Mavila said.

<http://www.poptel.org.uk/mozambique-news/newsletter/Cardoso13.html>