

AFFIDAVIT

Margaritha (Griet) Petronella Le Roux (Bruwer)

States under oath.

I am an adult female with RSA ID: [REDACTED]

1. The purpose of this statement is to draw attention to concerns surrounding the crash of the SAA *Rietbok* on 13 March 1967. Over the years, various inconsistencies and unresolved questions have emerged regarding the official account of the accident. In the accompanying statement, I outline key evidence and observations that warrant renewed consideration of the matter. My intention is not to assign blame, but to support a fair and transparent review of the available information so that the families of those who lost their lives may finally find clarity and closure.

2. On 22-07-1942 I was born in Madzi Myjo, Zambia, to parents Johannes Petrus van Schalkwyk Bruwer (father) and Cornelia Dorothea Gutter (mother), having one sister and two brothers of which the youngest Johannes Petrus van Schalkwyk Bruwer, can also provide important factual evidence in this matter. At times I will refer to overlapping events to which we were both exposed and upon which he can better elaborate.

3. In seeking to understand the complex and often ambiguous causes and aftermath of the 'Rietbok' tragedy, it is essential to consider the broader historical and political context. My father, Professor 'Hannes' Bruwer, a distinguished social anthropologist and vice-principal at the University of Port Elizabeth, was one of South Africa's foremost experts on African customs. Few individuals possessed a deeper understanding of the intricate social dynamics that shaped the lives of African communities.

4. He was called as a star witness for South Africa in the *South West Africa case before the World Court in The Hague (1960)*. His first professorship was at Stellenbosch University. As a member of the *Odendaal Commission (1962)*, he was the *chief draughtsman* of the five-year plan of separate-development policy in South West Africa.

5. Professor 'Hannes' Bruwer was subsequently appointed *Commissioner-General* for the Ovambos in South West Africa, with the same duties as the five Commissioners-General in the Bantu homelands. He was *acting chair of the Broederbond*, had gained a reputation as a 'verligte' (*enlightened person*) and was said to be steering then SA's Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd.

6. My father was a staunch supporter of the concept of separate development, he preferred to call "separate freedoms" and *never hesitated to criticize the Government* if he deemed it necessary. In fact, he was beginning to *doubt the very future of white rule* in the country.

7. Some of his pronouncements were prophetic. As early as 1956, he said the Government would have to face up to social problems involved in diplomatic relations with independent African states. Six years before it became a reality, Professor Bruwer said Indians had to be regarded as an integral part of the population and urged the creation of a Department of Indian Affairs. He further urged a faster consolidation of Black areas in South Africa, saying the country had come little closer to the true image of separate development living in a "dream of a theoretical gratification."

8. All of the aforementioned did not go unnoticed by hard-line "right wing" elements in the ruling National Party. They took a dim view on the good relationships my father had forged with leaders of recently independent countries such as Hastings Banda of Malawi.

9. On 6 September 1966 Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd was murdered in the House of Assembly in Cape Town, shortly before he made an important policy-changing speech related to the country's future. The speech is said to have disappeared during the ensuing chaos and rushing of the Prime Minister to hospital. The contents of the speech were never divulged or implemented, which suited the "right wing" elements who detested any threatening 'softening' of the staunch apartheid policies.

10. The significant speech had been written by my father who, after attending Verwoerd's memorial service, told an aunt of mine; "I'm the next one" (to be eliminated). Events which occurred six months

later, leave my brother Johannes Bruwer and I convinced that my father's premonition was correct and that he was targeted by the same persons responsible for Verwoerd's assassination.

11. In early March 1967, my father's secretary Mrs. Benjamin, was contacted by a 'Travel Agency' offering to handle his flight bookings since he travelled extensively. She told them that unfortunately his next flight had already been booked on the Rietbok, but she would contact the agency in future. However, when Mrs. Benjamin attempted to make a booking for another planned trip a few days later, she found that the 'Travel Agency' did not exist.

12. On March 11 1967, two days before the Rietbok disaster, Dr Helgard Muller visited Port Elizabeth and spent a day with my father to discuss an ambassadorship. He told my father of the intention to have him appointed as South Africa's "roving ambassador" for African countries. When my father boarded the Rietbok two days later, he was on his way to a final meeting in this regard with Minister B.J. Vorster in Pretoria. The announcement of the new post was to be made public the next week.

Monday: 13 March 1967

13. On this day my youngest brother Johannes Bruwer, together with a friend of his at Pearson High School, took our father to the airport. There they waited until my father boarded the SAA Vickers Viscount destined for East London. Only after the airplane took off, did my brother and his friend leave the Port Elizabeth airport.

14. That same evening of 13 March, my late brother Pieter Bruwer, who was living in Piketberg, received a telephone call from a police officer in East London. The officer informed of the Rietbok crash and several bodies and pieces of wreckage that washed ashore near Kayser's Beach near East London. The police officer asked Pieter to come and identify the body of my father, Professor JP van S Bruwer. My brother was told that the ordeal would not be too distressing, since my father had not been too badly disfigured. Pieter immediately left Piketberg and drove through the night by car to East London.

Tuesday 14 March 1967

15. In the morning after the Rietbok tragedy, it was widely reported in newspapers as diverse as Die Burger and the Rand Daily Mail that 21 bodies had already washed ashore. Further, that there was little hope that the other four persons on board the Rietbok would be found alive.

16. On the same Tuesday morning, two State Security officers arrived at Pearson High School. They asked for my brother Johannes and questioned him about his trip to the Port Elizabeth airport the previous day. They asked him to verify that he and his friend had taken my father to the airport. They asked if he had seen "with his own eyes", our father boarding the airplane to East London, which my brother confirmed. Reflecting upon this visit to a young boy and strange line of questioning, it seems the two officers were tasked with making sure my father was among the dead on the stricken airplane.

No Bodies Found

17. By sunrise on the 14th March, my brother Pieter Bruwer had already reached East London. At Kayser's Beach about 42 kilometres away, he discovered that police had cordoned off the entire beach area. When Pieter made inquiries about our father's body, he was told to wait for a certain police officer. When the officer arrived, he told my brother there had been a mistake and that *no bodies* had been found. My brother was not the only family member to have had such an experience.

18. Ms Helen Brown, the niece of one of the Rietbok disaster victims, Julie Venturas (21), told of how her mother, Mrs Venturas, was also contacted by the police and asked to travel to East London to identify her daughter Julie's body. At the time of this request being made, Mrs. Venturas was even given a correct detailed description of what Julie looked like, including what clothing she was wearing. However, a few hours later and before departing, Mrs Venturas received a second phone call from East London. Similarly to my brother Pieter, Mrs Venturas was informed that it was all a "mistake" and that *no bodies* had been found.

19. Ms Brown discovered that a former security policeman, later identified as Donald Card, had phoned the Sunday newspaper 'Rapport'. He claimed having been instructed to hang around Jan Smuts airport in Johannesburg on the night of 13 March 1967. He was told to be on the lookout for a woman with a brown briefcase suspected to have links with the banned African National Congress (ANC). Years later, the now

late Mr Card, said he believed the story about the ANC woman was a smokescreen and that the briefcase in question actually belonged to my father, Prof 'Hannes' Bruwer.

East London Airport

20. My brother Pieter held a private pilot's licence. He attempted to hire a small aircraft to fly over the scene of the Kayser's Beach disaster. However, he was informed the airspace above the crash area had been sealed off on orders of the minister of defence, PW Botha. Pieter made further inquiries and was allowed to listen to the final tape-recorded communication from the Rietbok's crew's to staff on duty at the East London airport. Pieter mentioned that from his flight experience there was nothing out of the ordinary in the voice of the pilot, nor the conversation.

21. The friend who accompanied Pieter on the car trip from Piketberg, asked if he too could listen to the tape-recorded last conversation. When Pieter made the same request as earlier to the airport officials to enable his friend the same privilege, he was told there was *no tape recording*." It became clear to Pieter that something was untoward. First there were bodies found, then the next day there were *no bodies*. Further, the official airport tape recording of the Rietbok which he had personally listened to, suddenly *did not exist*.

Kayser's Beach

22. Pieter tried to hire a boat to search the sea surrounding Kayser's Beach. He was met with the same earlier obstacle, that the beach, sea and airspace had been declared a no-go area by the minister of defence. My brother wanted to place a wreath on the sea in memory of our father, but even that request was denied. The police and authorities had claimed complete control of the Rietbok crash site.

Wednesday: 15 March 1967

23. By the second day after the crash, 15 March 1967, all the initial reports of bodies being found including the wreck of the Rietbok, were denied by the authorities and officials investigating the disaster. This despite credible reporters and newspapers known for their thoroughness having claimed otherwise. According to *Die Vaderland*, the origin of "the rumour" that 21 bodies had washed ashore, could not be established, despite having been broadcasted over a local radio station. In a page one lead, the Afrikaans paper *Dagbreek* stood their ground and told that the Rietbok had been found at a depth of 70 feet on the seabed near Kaysers Beach.

Evidence of Bodies

24. At least three bodies floating on the water, many pieces of wreckage including an oil slick, were seen by personnel on board two navy mine-sweepers, the SAS Mosselbaai and the SAS Johannesburg. They had visited and searched the crash area immediately after the disaster. This was confirmed to reporters of *Die Burger* in the month of January 1998, by the commanders of the two vessels, Captain Des Reaper (now retired in Simon's Town) and Captain David Forsight, commander of the naval unit SAS Port Rex in East London.

25. According to Captain Reaper, who was in overall command of the two vessels at the time, from the deck of the SAS Mosselbaai he "personally saw two bodies among the pieces of wreckage in the searchlight. The one was a man and the other a young woman with fair hair". He said that because of the high sides of the mine sweeper, they were unable to retrieve the bodies. He added, "We later turned the vessel around to retrieve the bodies but could not find them."

26. Reaper says several pieces of floating wreckage were recovered, including "a piece of the pilot cabin to which the airplane's licence number had been affixed". If bodies and pieces of wreckage (including several windows kept afloat by air trapped between the double panes), were seen floating on the water at a known location, why could the Rietbok wreck not be found there by the investigators?

27. In the weeks thereafter, every single piece of wreckage that washed ashore and was found by members of the public, was confiscated by the uniform police or security police members. To my

knowledge, none of the wreckage found included crucial evidence such as the plane's instrumentation panel, which could assist in clarifying the cause of the disaster.

Aftermath

28. Nothing became of the plan to appoint a “roving ambassador” to African states as told to my father by Dr Helgard Muller in Port Elizabeth two days before the Rietbok crash. This suggests that possibly there was never any intention on the part of the South African government to create such a position. President Kaunda sent my mother a telegram expressing his condolences including a letter inviting her to visit him in Zambia.

29. My mother Cornelia told me that the mystery deepened about **a month after the crash** when officials paid a visit to her demanding she sign a letter stating that she would not talk about the crash to anyone.

30. Another strange incident occurred when my mother was visited and handed an envelope which contained R7.000 towards her future and that of her children. In today's currency, that would equate to about R675.000, a huge amount of money.

31. I have previously submitted a detailed letter in which the aforementioned and other related evidence was presented. My brother Johannes Bruwer can verify most of the information contained in my statement and can further elaborate on such evidence.

32. It is evident that there is far more to the Rietbok crash than what has been regarded as “a normal accident.” The families of the victims deserve to know the full truth. Any official initiative to bring closure to this decades-old tragedy, should be given serious consideration and would be deeply appreciated.

I am familiar with and understand the contents of this declaration. I have no objection to taking the prescribed oath which I consider binding to my conscience.

Margaritha Petronella Le Roux

Date: _____
Place: _____
