

Morgan Tsvangirai's wife 'killed by US aid truck'

The wife of Morgan Tsvangirai, the Zimbabwean prime minister, was killed after the car she was travelling in with her husband collided with a US aid lorry, it has been reported.

By Mike Pflanz in Nairobi

Last Updated: 7:16AM GMT 09 Mar 2009



Mr Tsvangirai may be discharged from hospital on Saturday, doctors said, less than 24 hours after he was injured in the car crash which killed his wife, Susan.

The Movement for Democratic Change leader has been fitted with a neck-brace and has minor head injuries and chest pains, but is able to sit up and talk from his hospital bed.

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Dr Douglas Gwatidzo, head of casualty at the private clinic in Harare where Mr Tsvangirai, 56, is being treated, said: "We might release him today or tomorrow".

Mrs Tsvangirai, 50, died at the scene of the accident, on the main road leading south from the capital. Her husband is said to be "very devastated" by her death.

MDC party officials have called for an investigation into the circumstances of the crash, at 4pm on Friday. The couple's Toyota Landcruiser rolled three times after it was hit by a lorry which is understood to have swerved into their path to

avoid a pothole.

ABC News in the United States cited unnamed US officials as saying the truck belonged to a contractor working for the US and British governments.

The truck, which had a USAID insignia on it, was purchased by US government funds and its driver was hired by a British development agency, the report said. USAID stands for the US Agency for International Development.

State media in Zimbabwe had earlier reported that the lorry involved in the incident belonged to the US government aid organisation, USAID, and was carrying Aids medicines to Harare. A US Embassy official in the capital confirmed that the vehicle had been contracted to USAID.

This may help calm fears that foul play was involved. There have been several attempts on Mr Tsvangirai's life in the past few years. Other senior figures who have crossed the Zimbabwean regime have been injured or killed in suspicious road accidents.

However, rumours flew around the country, and its million-strong diaspora, on Friday night that the accident was in fact an assassination attempt on the prime minister, who was sworn in as co-leader of a unity government with President Robert Mugabe just three weeks ago.

There is still huge mistrust between both sides of the fledgling coalition.

Movement for Democratic Change leaders in neighbouring South Africa said they suspected the head on collision with a lorry which left Prime Minister Mr Tsvangirai injured and his wife Susan dead was not a genuine accident.

In a statement released on Friday night, they said: "We suspect that this is not a genuine accident and we appeal to Zimbabweans in South Africa to remain calm as facts continue to surface.

"We strongly believe that these are the evil acts of a few individuals bent on derailing the progress of the Inclusive government.

"We are, however, alive to the fact that a lot of Robert Mugabe's opponents died in suspicion road accidents involving army trucks."

Mr and Mrs Tsvangirai had been married for 31 years and had six children. Although she preferred to stay out of the limelight and was not herself politically active, Mrs Tsvangirai provided vital support for her husband, bringing him food in prison after his police beatings and nursing him back to health afterwards.

The demur Mrs Tsvangirai was also at her husband's side when he was sworn in last month, cutting a very different figure to Mr Mugabe's extrovert wife Grace who appeared at the ceremony in a lurid leopard skin dress.

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