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Departments 

How the Swiss helped apartheid South Africa to build the bomb

Breaking News

Switzerland played a key role in developing South Africa's nuclear weapons programme during apartheid, an investigation has revealed.

Peter Hug, a historian whose inquiry was sponsored by the Swiss authorities, said his country "was a pillar of support for the apartheid government".

According to his report, which also found evidence of Germany's role in bolstering the white regime, the Swiss government was aware of illegal deals but "tolerated them in silence, supported some of them actively or criticised them only half-heartedly".

The most alarming aspect of the co-operation was the involvement in South Africa's secret atomic weapons programme, said Mr Hug.

Between the 1970s and 1993 Pretoria built six nuclear weapons and partially assembled a seventh. The Swiss firms Gebruder Sulzer AG and VAT Buchs

supplied vital components.

"The fissionable material needed for this originated from the uranium enrichment that South Africa had built up with technical support from Switzerland, Germany and other countries.

"Swiss industry got around the arms embargo that the UN had imposed on South Africa in grand style," said Mr Hug, a historian at the University of Bern.

His report cited a deal worth at least 100 million Swiss francs (£44 million) which was brokered in 1977 and involved the supply of "highly sensitive technology".

Mr Hug said that Swiss industry violated the UN arms embargo and even flouted rules on arms exports defined by Switzerland.

In the mid-1980s most western countries, including the United States, imposed sweeping embargoes to try to bring an end to the policies of white domination.

But Switzerland refused to join the ban, arguing that it was incompatible with its neutrality and would have few practical results other than worsening the population's plight.

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