

Cuba plane crash: Black box found as 110 confirmed dead

20/05/2018



Cuba's worst aviation disaster in decades has killed 110 people, including five children, the country's transport minister confirmed.

As two days of national mourning began on Saturday, Adel Yzquierdo said just three people had survived the crash, all of whom were critically injured and are receiving treatment at a hospital in Cuba's capital, Havana.

The Boeing 737-201, on a domestic flight to the eastern city of Holguin, crashed at 12:08pm on Friday (16:08 GMT), shortly after taking off from Havana's Jose Marti International Airport.

Yzquierdo said those on board Flight 972, operated by state airline Cubana de Aviacion, included 102 Cubans, three tourists, two foreign residents and six crew members from Mexico.

The 39-year-old jet with its crew had been leased to Cubana de Aviacion by a Mexican company, Global Air, also known as Aerolineas Damojh.

Maite Quesada, a member of the Cuban Council of Churches, announced that 20 pastors from an evangelical church were among the dead. Argentina's foreign

ministry said earlier that two of its citizens had died in the crash.

The three survivors, who were pulled from the wreckage, were Cubans.

One of the plane's two black boxes has been recovered in "good condition" and handed to investigators, Yzquierdo said, with the other expected to be found "in the next few hours".

This was Cuba's third major air accident since 2010 and its worst since 1989 when 150 people were killed after a passenger plane crashed near the capital.

Skies were overcast and rainy at the time of the latest disaster, and Cuban state TV said the jet veered sharply to the right after departing.

"The only thing we heard, when we were checking in, an explosion, the lights went out in the airport, and we looked out and saw black smoke rising, and they told us a plane had crashed," Argentine tourist Brian Horanbuena told The Associated Press news agency at the airport.

Fire crews and ambulances rushed to the scene, while images posted on social media showed a thick column of smoke rising above the crash site.

The plane was almost completely destroyed in the crash and subsequent fire.

Investigation 'organised'

Cubana has had a generally good safety record but is notorious for delays and cancellations.

In recent months, it took many of its planes out of service because of maintenance problems, prompting it to hire charter aircraft from other companies.

Cuban President [Miguel Diaz-Canel](#) said a special commission had been formed to find the cause of the crash.

"Things have been organised, the fire has been put out, and the remains are being identified," he said, after visiting the site.

Boeing has offered to assist with the investigation.

'We're in mourning'

Relatives of those on board were ushered into a private area at the terminal to await word on their loved ones.

"My daughter is 24, my God, she's only 24!" cried Beatriz Pantoja, whose

daughter Leticia was on the plane.

A statement from Mexico's transportation department identified the pilot and co-pilot as Captain Jorge Luis Nunez Santos and first officer Miguel Angel Arreola Ramirez.

It also said the flight attendants were Maria Daniela Rios, Abigail Hernandez Garcia and Beatriz Limon. Global Air noted maintenance worker Marco Antonio Lopez Perez was also on board.

Outside the company's Mexico City offices, former Global Air flight attendant Ana Marlen Covarrubias said she had worked for the company for more than seven years and knew nearly all the crew members.

"I don't have the words. I'm very sad. We're in mourning," she said, in tears. "It was something really, really, really terrible; a tragedy for us."

In November 2010, a Global Air flight originating in Mexico City made an emergency landing in Puerto Vallarta because its front landing gear did not deploy.

The fire was quickly extinguished, and none of the 104 people on board was injured. That plane was a 737 first put into service in 1975.

Cuba's First Vice President Salvador Valdes Mesa had met Cubana officials on Thursday to discuss improvements to its service.

The airline blames its spotty record on a lack of parts and aeroplanes because of the US trade embargo against the communist-run country.

Last year, a Cuban military plane crashed into a hillside in the western province of Artemisa, killing eight soldiers.

In 2010, an AeroCaribbean flight from Santiago to Havana went down in bad weather, killing all 68 people on board, including 28 foreigners, in what was the country's worst air disaster in more than two decades.
