

## Search Goes On for Jet Lost in the Atlantic on Flight from Brazil to France

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Even during the night two Brazilian Air Force planes using radar and night vision kept the search on the Atlantic ocean for the Air France jet that went missing with 228 people on board while flying from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to Paris, France, a flight that lasts about 11 hours.

The Airbus A-330's last known location was unclear. Air France says that a short-circuit message was received at 02:14 GMT, 15 minutes after turbulence, while Brazil Air Force declares that last contact with the air plane was at 01:33 GMT off northern Brazil coast.

An Air France spokesman declared that the jet was probably struck by a lightening, provoking the short-circuit.

The Brazilian Air Force said its planes had begun searching for the airliner off the northeast coast of the South American country, soon after the loss of contact. France also sent a plane taking off from the Senegalese coast.

Flight AF 447 has 216 passengers and 12 crew on board. It left Rio de Janeiro on Sunday at 7 pm (22:00 GMT) and was expected to land at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport on Monday at 11:15 am (09:15 GMT). "Air France regrets to announce that it is without news from flight AF 447," an Air France spokesman said.

As there is "no hope to find survivors," according to French airport sources, Air France and the Charles de Gaulle Airport started to give away details about the passengers that were on board of the plane that disappeared.

216 passengers were on board: 126 men, 82 women, 7 children and one baby. 12 Air France employees were also on board, 3 pilots and co-pilots and 9 hosts. Italian newspaper claim five Italians were on board.

Henry Wilson, a Brazilian Air Force spokesman, said planes had taken off from the island of Fernando de Noronha off Brazil's northeast coast to look for the Air France jet. An Air France-KLM spokeswoman in Amsterdam said there had been no radio contact with the missing plane "for a while".

The plane was an Airbus 330-200, according to the Paris airports authority website. Air France said relatives of people travelling on board flight AF 447 were being taken care of in a special area of Charles de Gaulle airport.

Brazil had two major plane crashes in 2006 and 2007, raising concerns about the safety of air travel in Latin America's largest country. In July 2007, all 187 people on board and 12 people on the ground died when a TAM airline Airbus A 320 overshot a runway at Sao Paulo's Congonhas airport.

In September 2006, a Gol airline passenger jet crashed in the Amazon jungle after it and a small private plane collided. All 154 people on board died.

#### Airbus Note

Airbus regrets to confirm that an Airbus A330-200 operated by Air France has been lost about 3.5 hours after departure. The aircraft was operating a scheduled service, Flight AF 447, from Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) to Paris (France).

The missing aircraft involved in the accident, registered under the number F-GZCP, was MSN (Manufacturer Serial Number) 660, delivered to Air France from the production line in April 2005. The aircraft had accumulated approximately 18,800 flight hours in some 2,500 flights. It was powered by CF6-80E1 engines. At this time no further factual information is available.

In line with ICAO Annex 13 international convention, Airbus has offered full technical assistance to the investigation board. The investigation remains the entire responsibility of the relevant board and it would be inappropriate for Airbus to enter into any form of speculation into the causes of the accident.

The concerns and sympathy of the Airbus employees go to the families, friends and loved ones affected by the accident.

#### Tropical Weather Zone

Authorities say Flight 447 was proceeding normally for at least the first four hours after takeoff, when it passed out of radar contact with Brazil beyond the Fernando de Noronha archipelago.

The Airbus A-330 later crossed through a tropical weather zone near the equator that frequently spawns strong turbulence and powerful thunderstorms. At about that time, the plane transmitted an automatic message reporting an electrical failure.

An Air France spokesman said a combination of circumstances, including lightning, could have brought down the plane. Lightning strikes on planes are common, however, and aviation experts say that alone could not explain what apparently was a disastrous crash into the ocean.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy went to Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris Monday to offer his sympathy to passengers' families. He told reporters the chance of finding any survivors is very small.

Meanwhile, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said he held out hope for survivors, but the French News Agency (AFP) reported he had spoken with the French leader by telephone earlier and that the conversation "was an exchange of condolences."

Search planes and ships from France, Brazil and Spain are looking for any sign of what happened to the big jet, which carried 216 passengers and 12 crew members.

Many of the passengers on board were Brazilian, French or German citizens. Nationals from more than two dozen countries, including two people from the United States, also were aboard the commercial jet.

Mr. Sarkozy said France has asked the United States to use its spy satellites and listening devices to help in the search effort. He told reporters it will be difficult to find traces of the plane, because the search area is immense.

Aviation experts say flight-recorder equipment aboard the Airbus automatically will broadcast a locator signal for 30 days, but that the ocean depths could sharply limit the signal's range.

MP/Bzz/VoA