

Air France Tragedy: Brazilian Navy Finds 8 More Bodies. 24 Recovered Now

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Brazilian Air Force and Navy search teams together with the French have recovered now 24 bodies from the victims aboard Air France flight 447, which fell into the Atlantic while going from Rio to Paris. Sixteen bodies had been retrieved Sunday, this Monday eight new corpses were found and picked up from the sea.

The new bodies were found 440 km (273 miles) northeast of the São Pedro e São Paulo archipelago, in Fernando de Noronha, Brazil.

The Air France Airbus was carrying 228 people from 32 countries, including passengers and crew. The flight left Rio de Janeiro May 31st at 7:30 pm. The last voice communication of the aircraft was received at 10:33 pm. Fifteen minutes later the jet went out of the Fernando de Noronha's radar coverage area.

Brazilian authorities have decided that from now on they will not reveal the gender of the bodies found anymore and that they will give information only on the bodies they find and not the ones discovered by the French in order to avoid misinformation. Sunday was disclosed that 17 corpses had already been found when the real number was 16.

Navy and Air Force still don't have a deadline for their search and retrieval operations. Fourteen airplanes (12 Brazilian and 2 French) plus 6 ships (4 Brazilian and 2 French) are taking part in the effort. The Navy is operating with 570 military men. The average depth of the area being searched is 3,500 meters (11,500 feet).

Search crews from the Brazilian Navy recovered the vertical stabilizer from the tail section, Brazil's air force said Monday, which is considered a key find that could help locate its black boxes and determine why the jet crashed.

The US Navy is sending equipment and personnel to help search for the aircraft's flight-data recorders, known as black boxes, and two French mini-submarines are scheduled to arrive in the area June 12.

According to lieutenant colonel Henry Munhoz, spokesman for the Air Force, all the bodies retrieved are on board Brazilian ships and they will be taken initially to Fernando de Noronha and, then to Recife, capital of the northeastern Brazilian state of Pernambuco.

"The transportation should be done by the helicopters that are in the island, but we still have not defined a strategy on how to do this transportation," said Munhoz.

The first 16 bodies are being transported by the Frigate Constituição. The vessel is being expected this Tuesday, June 9 in Fernando de Noronha, but bad weather might delay the work.

Munhoz doesn't see the finding of the black boxes as a priority for now. "The priority of our work is to search for survivors, bodies and wreckage. As debris is found, it is picked up and prepared to be taken to Recife where the pieces will be delivered to the French authorities," he added.

Pilots Protest

An Air France labor union of pilots called on its members to refuse to fly Airbus A330s and A340s until the airline replaces speed sensors after investigators said the equipment probably played a role in the crash.

The Alter union, which represents 12% of the Paris-based carrier's pilots, wants Air France to replace at least two of the three probes on each plane, François Hamant, a spokesman at the labor group was quoted by the French press.

"We made this decision following our reading of the technical messages sent automatically by the Air France A330 that went down into the Atlantic Ocean a week ago," Hamant said. "Air France communicated to pilots that it accelerated the program to replace these probes. I'm not a technical expert but it makes us fear that this is a very serious matter."

Unreliable data from speed sensors is one of several hypotheses under consideration that may have triggered a chain of events leading to the crash of Air France Flight 447 that killed 228 people, France's chief crash investigator said.

Brigitte Barrant, a spokeswoman at the airline, declined to comment on the union's demands. The carrier has been changing the probes, made by Thales SA, on single-aisle Airbus A320s since late 2007 and on twin-aisle A330s and A340s since May.

Air France pilots are represented by a half-dozen unions, with the largest, SNPL-ALPA, claiming 50% of them as members. SNPL-ALPA hasn't made any recommendation yet, a spokesman said.

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