

## Chaos at Brazil's Airports Leads Lula to Call Emergency Late-Night Meeting

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A breakdown in the radios that control Brazilian airspace, which caused misery in airports throughout Brazil, yesterday, December 5, continued to affect passengers in Brazilian airports this morning.

In Rio's Tom Jobim international airport, people after waiting over six hours still couldn't get a confirmation for their flights this Wednesday.

Airlines not only didn't know what to tell ticket holders they also were overwhelmed by the lines and complaints and were not able to provide food and lodging for all stranded passengers.

After a chaotic day in the main Brazilian airports, Air Force commander, brigadier Luiz Carlos Bueno, at the end of the night, announced that the equipment that had failed at Cindacta 1, the air control center in capital Brasília, was working fine and that flights were back to normal.

According to the Air Force chief this was the first time the communication radios failed so dramatically. The malfunction at Brasília's Air Defense and Air Traffic Control Integrated Center in motion a chain of trouble with flight delays, cancellations and public discontent throughout the day. At 7:30 pm all takeoffs (around 100 of them) from Congonhas (São Paulo), Confins (Belo Horizonte) and Brasília had been cancelled.

The crisis became so severe that President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva held an emergency late-night meeting with Defense Minister Waldir Pires, Air Force commander Luiz Carlos Bueno, chief of staff Dilma Rousseff, and Milton Zuanazzi, the president of ANAC (Brazilian Civil Aviation Agency). It was already 10:15 when the encounter ended.

Pires informed that the president has ordered the purchase of radio equipment similar to that used in Brasília for the São Paulo airport. The reasoning behind it is that this new equipment might be used as backup in case Cindacta 1 once again acts up.

According to him, Lula had asked for assurance that Brazil would never again endure a flight paralyzation like the one that occurred Tuesday. And he concluded: "The flights are being restored at this moment and tomorrow (this Wednesday) the situation will be back to normal."

Bueno told reporters that yesterday's cancelled flights had been rescheduled for today: "It is true," he said, "that there is a very large quantity of accumulated flights here in Brasília, so that you may expect some delay for some specific locations. But everything is restored."

Colonel-aviator Carlos Vuyk de Aquino, Cindacta 1's commander, told reporters that the trouble in Brasília was caused by a failure in the connection between the radio frequencies' active and backup systems. Both operate together amounting to a total of 20 different frequency bands. With the breakdown, communications were reduced to 13 frequencies.

At about 1 pm, yesterday, the whole radio communication system went down. At that time, as a safety measure, Brasília's air control center directed all planes flying in their area to immediately land and subsequently prevented planes from taking off from that airport, which is a hub between the north and the south of Brazil.