

Nigeria Aviation Chief Blames God for Air Crash

Nigeria's aviation minister has caused outrage by calling air crashes inevitable acts of God, as she sought to deflect criticism of her record after the country's second deadly accident in 15 months.

Stella Oduah was speaking to journalists at the presidential villa on Monday, three days after 16 people were killed in a small passenger plane that crashed shortly after take-off outside Lagos airport's domestic terminal.

In June last year, a Dana Air flight crashed into a Lagos apartment block, killing 163 people in the country's worst airline disaster in two decades.

An investigation has yet to reveal the cause.

"We do not pray for accidents but it is inevitable ... We do everything to ensure that we do not have accidents, but it is an act of God," she said. "We do not speculate on the cause of accidents."

Oduah later qualified her comment, saying that everyone from baggage handlers to regulators, airlines and management shared responsibility for passenger safety and that a preliminary report into the latest crash should be out in a couple of weeks.

But Nigerian newspapers and Twitter exploded with angry responses. Former Aviation Minister Femi Fani-Kayode was quoted in *Vanguard* local daily as calling for her resignation.

The Punch newspaper quoted popular blogger Japheth Omojuwa as saying: "If God is in charge of safety in the aviation sector, we are then duplicating roles by paying a salary (to the

minister)... When you start passing the buck to God, then the time has arrived to pass on your resignation letter.”

Oduah’s spokesman was not immediately available for comment.

The belief that fatal accidents are acts of God, or of malevolent spirits, is common in Nigeria and many other African countries.

Air crashes are relatively frequent in Africa’s second biggest economy, where a sophisticated financial sector and large professional class depend on flights, although safety improved a lot in the years just before the Dana crash.

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