

Plane Crashes After Take-Off in Cuba, Number Feared Dead or Injured

A Boeing 737 plane crashed on Friday shortly after taking off from Havana's main airport on a domestic flight, with a number of people feared dead or injured, Reuters witnesses and officials said.

There were at least three possible survivors among the 105 passengers plus nine crew, Cuban state-run media reported, adding that there were five children on board. Earlier reports on state media said there were 104 passengers.

The number of casualties was not immediately known, but Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, visiting the site of the crash, told Agence France Presse: "It appears there is a high number of victims."

Wreckage was strewn over the area and ambulances and firefighters were at the scene, a Reuters witness said. The fire had been put out, and blackened parts of the fuselage could be seen.

"We heard an explosion and then saw a big cloud of smoke go up," said Gilberto Menendez, who runs a restaurant near the crash site in the agricultural area of Boyeros, 20 km (12 miles) south of Havana.

A worker at Havana's Calixto Garcia hospital told Reuters three victims of the accident had arrived so far. One had died from burns and other trauma and the other two were in a serious state.

"She is alive but very burnt and swollen," said a distressed relative of one of the survivors at the hospital.

The flight was destined for Holguin and was leased by airline Cubana from a small Mexican airline called Damojh or Global, Cuban state media said. Cubana declined to comment.

Holguin in eastern Cuba is home to some of the island's most pristine beaches, and attracts tourists. The nationality of those on board was not immediately clear. State media said that the crew were foreign, but provided no further details.

Flight tracking websites indicated the flight was CU972, departing Havana at 11 a.m. (1500 GMT).

Boeing Co said in a Twitter post: "We are aware of news reports out of Cuba and are closely monitoring the situation."

A Damojh representative told Reuters in Mexico: "There is still no information, we are gathering what we can to give correct information. As the day progresses there will be more information."

The last fatal crash in Cuba was in 2017, the Aviation Safety Network said. It was a military flight that killed all eight personnel aboard. In 2010, a commercial Aero Caribbean plane crashed in central Cuba. All 68 people on board were killed.

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