

Crash: company chief, two other bodies recovered

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- Agency, minister promise full investigation

The Chief Executive Officer of Bacita Sugar Company, Reverend (Mrs.) Josephine Kuteyi, her personal assistant and Captain Annord, a Filipino, were the occupants of the ill-fated helicopter that crashed in Ife Odan, Osun state last Friday.

Director General of the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) Dr. Harold Demuren, who identified them, however said the name of the personal assistant was not immediately known.

But villagers and rescue workers at the crash site gave her name as Mrs. Adedoyin.

The crash, it was learnt, occurred around 9.45am.

Rescue works were however hampered for hours due to the difficult terrains of the hilly side of the Government Reserve Forest in Ife-Odan where the helicopter crashed.

Rescue workers said the Ash colour helicopter with blue strip could not be reached until 1am the following day.

Osun State Police Commissioner, Mr. Solomon Olusegun, said: "It took serious efforts of men of many security agencies in the state, the local vigilante, Osun State Youth Volunteers Corps and community people to recover the corpses of the victims and their personal belongings."

The Chairman, Osun State Emergency Management Agency (OSEMA), Engineer Segun Ajayi, disclosed that the rescue team got across to the victims' relations through identity cards and other items found on them.

Their remains have been deposited at the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), Teaching Hospital, Osogbo.

The Accident Investigation Bureau (AIB) has however assured of thorough investigations into the incident following an order by Minister of Aviation, Mrs. Stella Oduah – Ogiewmonyi to prevent

re-occurrence.

AIB is the government agency saddled with the task of investigating air disasters in the country.

Head of its Public Affairs, Mr. Tunji Oketunbi, gave this assurance in a statement yesterday.

It reads: "An Ecureuil 350 helicopter marked 5N BKA belonging to OAS Airlines crashed on Friday July 28, 2011 into Oke Oba Hill in Ikonifin, between Ife Odan and Ogbomosho.

"The aircraft departed airline's helipad in Maryland, Lagos at 9.25am with three passengers on board including two female passengers and a male pilot. All occupants were fatally injured.

"Investigators from the AIB arrived at the site this morning (29th July 2011) and have commenced investigations.

"Meanwhile, the remains of the occupants have been transferred to Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) Teaching Hospital, Osogbo in Osun State.

"Our thoughts go out to all the families of the victims.

The public will be updated as investigation continues."

Oduah- Ogiewmonyi, in a condolence message to families of the deceased, asked God to give them the

fortitude to bear the irreparable losses.

She assured that efforts to ensure air safety in the country remain unflinching.

Speaking through her media assistant, Joe Obi, Oduah-Ogiewmonyi said : " I want to expressed deep sadness over the death of three souls (two women) and one man (the captain) of the OAS helicopter with Reg. Number 5N-BKA that crashed Friday in Ori- Oke village, Ife-Odan, Osun state.

"I send my condolences to the families of the deceased and pray the Almighty God to give them the strength and resolve to bear the irreparable loss.

"The news of the crash came as a rude shock to the me since assumption of office barely one month ago, as we have been working hard to ensure safety in the country's airspace. "

Osun state governor Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola also expressed sadness over the incident.

He revealed that state agencies put so much effort into the rescue operations.

A statement by the Director, Bureau of Communications and Strategy in the Office of the Governor, Mr. Semiu Okanlawon, said: "As soon as information got to the Governor that an helicopter heading for Ilorin in Kwara State had crashed somewhere in Osun State, he directed all concerned agencies to act fast with a view to locating the site and rescuing the occupants of the ill-fated helicopter.

"Instantly, officials of the Osun Emergency Management Authority, (OSEMA) led by its General Manager, Engr. Ajayi, Volunteers of the Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme, (OYES), under the leadership of Col. Enibukun Oyewole, and other officials of the state were deployed to locate the site of the crash.

"The remains of the three occupants of the helicopter- a businesswoman, her Personal Assistant and the pilot –were recovered on Saturday.

"On the directive of the Governor, ambulances in the three adjoining local government areas –Ola-Oluwa, Iwo and Aiyedire- were also deployed to handle the evacuation of the remains which have now been deposited at the Ladoke Akintola Teaching Hospital, Osogbo, the state capital.

"The Governor wishes to commiserate with the families of the deceased, the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority and the entire country over this sad development."

Sources in Ilorin International Airport however revealed the pilot did not make contact with the control tower before the crash.

Preliminary investigations revealed there was no communication whatsoever from the pilot that would have guided his movement.

Staff expressed shock over the death of Kuteyi who they said was a regular face at the airport.

She was said to fly in and out of the airport either on chartered flights or helicopter.

Unconfirmed reports said she was on her way to Ilorin to keep an appointment with a high-ranking government official.