

Six NNPC officials aboard chopper that crashed into ocean

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reau (NSIB), the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority, and other relevant agencies.

"The President condoles with the Board and staff of Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) and the families of all those who were confirmed to have passed away in the accident.

"President Tinubu fervently prays that the Almighty God will grant eternal rest to the three departed souls and comfort their families."

The NNPC said search and rescue operations commenced almost immediately after the accident.

Its spokesman, Olufemi Soneye, said the public oil firm engaged the helicopter with "its staffers on board."

Soneye offered prayers for the passengers, the crew, and their families.

He said: "There were eight persons on board - six passengers and two crew members."

"The appropriate authorities have been contacted, including the Ministry of Aviation, who have since issued a press statement. Search and rescue missions are currently ongoing. So far, three bodies have been recovered."

"We shall continue to monitor the situation and provide regular updates as the events unfold. Our prayers are with the passengers, crew, and their respective families at this very difficult time. We assure you that we will continue doing everything possible to support the ongoing search and rescue operation."

Pilot's body mourns Captain Dukas

In its statement, NAAPE mourned the passing of Dukas, whom it described as a seasoned helicopter pilot with more than 20 years of flying knowledge.

"It called on the government and stakeholders to always 'target zero for accidents' because of the catastrophic nature of air crashes."

A statement by the association's President, Abednego Galadima, on the accident partly reads: "More saddening is that the captain on board, Capt Yakubu Dukas, is a seasoned helicopter pilot with more than 20 years flying experience and until this unfortunate accident, was the Vice President of our great union."

"We have always maintained that the operating conditions in the aviation industry must always be optimal for all professionals for the safety of all, knowing that there is no parking space up there."

"We call on the government and all stakeholders, to always ensure that in all their operations, they target zero for accidents because of the catastrophic nature of air crashes."

"We also call on all relevant agencies to ensure no stone is left unturned in unearthing the immediate and remote causes of this tragic occurrence and all the measures required

to be put in place to forestall any further occurrence."

"Our prayers are with all families whose beloved ones were on board."

The Nation learnt that immediately after the crash, the Nigerian Navy deployed one of its helicopters with elements of its special forces to the scene, but bad weather forced them to make a detour.

Surface vessels were then deployed by the Navy to locate the helicopter and possibly rescue the remaining victims.

No Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT) signal was received from the chopper, a development that led to the use of manual mapping "to plot the location of the accident."

Aviation and Aerospace Development Minister Festus Keyamo said the Nigerian Search and Rescue Unit, the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), the National Safety Investigation Bureau (NSIB), and other relevant agencies were mandated to immediately carry out search and rescue efforts.

Keyamo added in a statement by his media aide, Odutayo Oluseyi, that the support of "neighbouring aerodromes" was also sought.

He said: "While no Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT) signal was received, manual efforts to plot the location of the accident are underway, and all available resources, including the military and low-flying aircraft, have been deployed to assist in locating and rescuing any survivor(s)."

"So far, three bodies have been recovered."

The spokesperson for NSIB, Bimbo Oladeji, confirmed the agency had commenced an investigation into the accident. She added that the helicopter lost contact with air traffic controllers around 10:52 am.

Captain Alex Badeh Jr., director-general of the NSIB, sympathised with the families of the victims.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the families affected by this tragic incident. We are fully committed to uncovering the circumstances surrounding this accident," he said.

Eastwind Aviation, which also empathised with families of the victims, revealed that "identification procedures are currently underway."

"The bodies of three of those on board have been recovered thus far, and identification procedures are currently underway. Search and rescue operations are currently ongoing for the remaining individuals," it said in a statement.

"Our thoughts are with the families and loved ones affected by this unfortunate incident. We understand this is an incredibly difficult and anxious time for them."

"Our dedicated team is providing direct support to the families, and we will continue to update them as we receive confirmed information," the company added.