

8 die as helicopter plunges into Atlantic Ocean, FG launches probe

Wole Shadare

The Nigerian Safety Investigation Bureau (NSIB) yesterday launched an investigation into the helicopter crash which claimed three lives in Rivers State.

The helicopter carrying eight individuals six passengers and two crew members went down into the Atlantic Ocean near Bonny Finima off the coast of Calabar during a routine flight at about 11.22 am.

In a statement, the NSIB said the aircraft lost contact with air traffic controllers around 10.52 am.

Operating under Visual Flight Rules (VFR), the body said the helicopter did not

transmit an Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT) signal, prompting authorities to manually plot the accident's location to expedite search and rescue efforts.

It said: "Search and rescue operations were activated immediately, with the NSIB collaborating closely with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), the armed forces and other relevant agencies.

"Emergency response teams are actively working to locate survivors, with three bodies recovered so far.

"The search continues with support from neighbouring aerodromes, military units, and low-flying aircraft."

Director-General Alex Ba-

deh Jr. said: "We will work diligently to ensure that all necessary information is collected."

Meanwhile, the National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers (NAAPE) expressed shock over the crash and the death of one of its members Capt Yakubu Dukas in the accident.

President Abednego Galadima said: "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."

He stated that the group had 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.

The group called 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.

NAAPE equally called 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.

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