

Ethiopian airline defends its pilots' training standards

March 21 2019, by Elias Meseret



In this March 21, 2018, file photo a Thai Lion Air employee displays a ceremonial key to the company's newest plane, Boeing's first 737 MAX 9 jet, following a delivery ceremony to the airline in Seattle. The United States and many other countries have grounded the Max 8s and larger Max 9s as Boeing faces the challenge of proving the jets are safe to fly amid suspicions that faulty sensors and software contributed to the two crashes in less than five months. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File)

Ethiopian Airlines said Thursday that its pilots went through all the extra training required by Boeing and the U.S. aviation regulators to fly the 737 Max 8 jet that crashed this month, killing all 157 people on board.

CEO Tewolde Gebremariam said that the airline's pilots completed the training meant to help them shift from an older model to the newer 737 Max 8.

He said in a statement the pilots were also made aware of an emergency directive issued by the U.S. regulator, the FAA, following the crash of a Boeing 737 Max 8 owned by Indonesia's Lion Air in October.

As investigators look into the crashes, attention has turned to a new software in the jets that can push their nose down in some circumstances, for example when the sensors suggest the plane may be stalling.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration has said satellite-based tracking data showed that the movements of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 were similar to those of Lion Air Flight 610, which killed 189 people.

The New York Times reported that the pilots of the Ethiopian plane never trained in a simulator for the plane. Gebremariam said that the 737 Max simulator is not designed to simulate problems in the new jet software. He declined, however, to say whether the pilots had trained on the simulator.



In this Monday, March 11, 2019 file photo, a Boeing 737 MAX 8 airplane being built for TUI Group sits parked in the background at right at Boeing Co.'s Renton Assembly Plant in Renton, Wash. The Transportation Department confirmed that its watchdog agency will examine how the FAA certified the Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft, the now-grounded plane involved in two fatal accidents within five months. The FAA had stood by the safety of the plane up until last Wednesday, March 13, 2019 despite other countries grounding it. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren, File)

The Ethiopian Airlines jetliner, on a regularly scheduled flight from Ethiopia to neighboring Kenya, carried people from 35 countries when it crashed on March 10 shortly after takeoff from the capital Addis Ababa.

The Boeing Max planes have since been grounded around the world as authorities try to identify the problem and Boeing issues an update to its aviation software.

Meanwhile, the families of Kenyan victims of the Ethiopian plane crash are asking their government for legal assistance in pursuing compensation.

In an emotional gathering Thursday in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, the victims' relatives asked for lawyers to help them pursue their case.



In this March 13, 2019, file photo people work in the flight deck of a Boeing 737 MAX 8 airplane being built for TUI Group parked next to another MAX 8 also designated for TUI at Boeing Co.'s Renton Assembly Plant in Renton, Wash. U.S. prosecutors are looking into the development of Boeing's 737 Max jets, a person briefed on the matter revealed Monday, the same day French aviation investigators concluded there were "clear similarities" in the crash of an Ethiopian Airlines Max 8 last week and a Lion Air jet in October. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren, file)

"If we are left alone, clearly we can't move," said Merciline Ndegwa, one of the relatives seeking compensation. "It's been a difficult time reaching out to the airline and even Ethiopia's government. So, as we move forward, it is our wish to have help from the government in that front."

Another, Erick Mwangi, spoke of what could be an "expensive and tedious" legal battle.

Macharia Kamau, principal secretary of Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, advised the families to "come together as a group" as the country's attorney general takes up the matter.

The government will assist in obtaining death certificates for the victims, he said.



In this March 14, 2019, file photo a worker walks next to a Boeing 737 MAX 8

airplane parked at Boeing Field in Seattle. U.S. prosecutors are looking into the development of Boeing's 737 Max jets, a person briefed on the matter revealed Monday, the same day French aviation investigators concluded there were "clear similarities" in the crash of an Ethiopian Airlines Max 8 last week and a Lion Air jet in October. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren, File)

Officials have delivered bags of scorched earth from the crash site to family members of the victims because of the problems with identifying the remains.

Thirty-two Kenyans were among the 157 victims of the plane crash. No nation lost more.

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