

Media Statement

Netcare 911

SA rescue services assist with repatriation of bodies from Congo plane crash

Johannesburg, Friday 25 June 2010 The first call requesting assistance was received at the international assistance desk of Netcare 911 in Johannesburg, South Africa, at 08h45 on Monday, 21 June. An aircraft had presumably gone down two days earlier in a remote part of Yaoundé, Cameroon – on board was a group of mining executives from a well-known Australian mining company.

Later that same day military aircraft finally located the missing aircraft in a remote part of North-East Congo. Some hours later a second call placing Netcare 911 on standby for the rendering of aeromedical services to possible survivors of the disaster was received.

A total of eleven lives were lost when the plane crashed in thick jungle in the Congo close to the border of Cameroon in West Africa. The entire board of the Australian-based mining company Sundance Resources, including mining magnate Ken Talbot were killed in the crash that made headlines in Australia and elsewhere in the world.

Instead of launching a medical rescue, the services and expertise of South African rescue services were called upon. Specialised rescue equipment and technicians were needed as some of the bodies were trapped in the wreckage of the aircraft.

James Crawford-Nutt, International Business Development Manager, Netcare 911 explains that the emergency medical services provider had been approached to assist in the recovery of the bodies and to arrange the repatriation of the deceased to their home countries. He explains that Netcare 911 had been called upon to assist because the crash had taken place in a very remote area where considerable difficulties were being experienced in the extraction of the bodies.

“Netcare 911 mobilised a number of expert resources at very short notice. We also drew in the support of Rescue South Africa to assist with the mission by supplying equipment and a technician. They accompanied a Netcare 911 team under the leadership of Mark Stokoe to the crash site on Wednesday, 23 June.”

A special aircraft ZS-BEN was chartered by funeral directors, Tom Kight, to move crew and equipment to Brazzaville. From there crew and equipment had to be transported by French Military Helicopters to the crash site where the recovery of the bodies were undertaken on Thursday, 24 June.

Crawford-Nutt says that Netcare 911 Assistance runs a highly effective aeromedical and repatriation service that operates throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Earlier this year Netcare 911 further improved its reach after it formed a partnership with RMSI, which offers similar services in North Africa, the Middle East and other parts of the world.

Crawford-Nutt suggested that Netcare 911 was called upon because of its extensive experience in African operations, and the expertise the organisation employed. "We have made steady strides in growing our service's reach and are being asked for assistance in increasingly more important and involved projects."

"While nothing gives us greater pleasure than employing our aircraft in order to perform a mercy flight that would save the life of a human being, we also understand that there are other times when the only service that we can perform is to retrieve the body of a loved one and to get it safely home," he adds.

"This is one of the saddest missions we have undertaken to date. It is nevertheless every bit as important as any other. We offer our condolences to the loved ones of the accident victims and are pleased that we could be of service in returning the bodies of the deceased home," he concluded.

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