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PRESS RELEASE

15 UNAMSIL PEACEKEEPERS DIE IN PLANE CRASH IN BENIN REPUBLIC

15 Bangladeshi peacekeepers, 13 of them officers serving with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, two from United Nations Mission in Liberia, UNMIL have been identified as having been killed in a plane crash on December 25 in the West African country of Benin Republic. The remains of the 15 are expected to be flown to Bangladesh on Tuesday December 30.

The officers were traveling home for the holidays aboard a Boeing 727 belonging to the Union Transport African (UTA) when it crashed off the coast of Cotonou, the country's capital city immediately after takeoff.

Those who died in the crash are, Lt. Col. Shamsul Sayed Arefin, Maj. Abdur Rahim, Maj. Mir Abdul Baten, Maj. Mostafizur Rahman Sudari, Maj. Md Raunak Akhter and Maj. Mosharref Hossain.

Others are, Maj. Intiazuddin Ahmed, Capt. Abdul Mabud, Capt. Zahidul Islam, Capt. Rakibul Hasan, Capt Fariduddin Ahmed and Capt Alauddin Sarder.

Capt Rafiqul Islam, Capt Arifur Rahman Talukder and SWO Sharifqul Islam also died in the crash.

The French Embassy in Benin has provided 15 coffins in which the bodies are to be repatriated to Bangladesh. President Mathew Kerekou of Benin is expected to be at the airport Tuesday where a ceremony is being planned in honour of the dead peacekeepers.

According to Benin government officials, there were 161 passengers on board the plane. 21 people survived and 131 bodies have so far been identified. Eight bodies are still missing.

UNAMSIL had sent an 11-member coordination team to Cotonou to sort out modalities for repatriation of the bodies to their home country and also to identify the victims as soon as possible.

The Force Commander, General Sajjad on behalf of the Ag SRSG and the entire UNAMSIL staff has conveyed condolences to the families of the victims, the Bangladesh contingent in UNAMSIL and people of Bangladesh.

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