

I know they are still alive, say MH370 relatives

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By Stephan Scheuer, dpa

MH370 Every day Zhang Yongli painstakingly records news and events relating to flight MH370, which vanished a year ago on its way from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

Keeping track of developments on the Boeing 777-200 that disappeared without a trace on March 8, 2014 makes the pain of the loss of his 32-year-old son more bearable.

“Otherwise I would go crazy,” he says.

Zhang has brought a tablet into the company canteen at the Beijing airport. He nods to the catering staff and they smile back at him.

The 64-year-old pensioner comes there every day for lunch before he goes to the complaints office of the Chinese aviation authorities.

“We have to keep up the pressure,” Zhang says. The search for the 239 people on board, with 154 from China and Taiwan, must never be abandoned, he insists.

“I know they are still alive,” Zhang says.

The authorities have set up a special room for relatives of the passengers, a plain, cold room under neon lighting. Tables are set up near windows where the officials are seated.

There are around 30 wooden chairs in the room. The office is often full at midday, particularly if a large group has turned up.

The staff listen patiently to the questions, but the answers do not change. Malaysia is coordinating the investigation, and China can only assist. The relatives are assured that the search is continuing.

For Li Shuping, 57, the quest to find her daughter and only child has become the sole purpose of her life. The 29-year-old woman was engaged to be married, with her wedding date set, when she flew to Malaysia on business.

“I simply can’t understand how today every mobile phone can be tracked, but a huge Boeing is supposed to have simply disappeared. Something does not add up,” Li says.

Malaysia Airlines has offered her compensation, but Li has refused it. “It’s not about money. I want my daughter back,” she says.

In January, Malaysia attempted to draw a line under the MH370 disaster, declaring it an accident with the loss of all on board.

'No compelling evidence'

Many of the relatives felt themselves insulted. "How could they do that? Right up to today there is no compelling evidence," says Gan Mingsong, who lost his 47-year-old son.

"This is about people's lives. They cannot simply be deleted on paper," he says. His son left a wife and a small child.

Li Shuping and the other relatives live in fear that the search will be abandoned.

After the initial confusion following the disappearance, the search teams now believe that the aircraft went down in the southern Indian Ocean, thousands of kilometres from the intended flight path.

The sea is up to 6,000 metres deep in the region.

Zhang swears he will never give up hope. "I am always going to come back to the complaints office," he says.

He has filled nearly four notebooks, but intends to continue taking notes until he knows with certainty his son's fate.

"He must still be alive. I know that he is out there somewhere," Zhang says.

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