

MH370 families vow not to give up hope until there is proof
The Malaysian Insider
March 5, 2015

Just three days to the first anniversary of the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines (MAS) flight MH370, families of the missing passengers and crew have vowed not to give up hope until there is physical evidence of the aircraft.

In a statement today, Voice370 – a group made up of wives, husbands, children, parents and other close relatives of the missing passengers and crew – also called on Putrajaya to commit to the search for the missing plane and their loved ones until they are found.

"Despite the complete lack of wreckage found or physical evidence of a catastrophic event, the Malaysian government has officially declared that the airplane crashed, leaving no survivors, and it has ended the rescue phase of the search effort.

"We do not accept this finding and we will not give up hope until we have definitive proof of what happened to MH370," it said.

On March 8 last year, flight MH370 vanished en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 239 people on board. There has so far not been any signs of the plane and those on board.

Voice370 said it was unlikely that on Sunday, the next of kin would find out anything more about the final moments of the flight or the whereabouts of their family members.

It said the disaster had been devastating for the families and caring people all over the world, and in the months following the disappearance of the plane, MH370 families were subjected to "a disorganised barrage of information from varied sources, much of which later proved to be incorrect".

"This included when the plane's transponder and Acars (Aircraft Communications and Reporting System) stopped sending data in relation to the crew's last recorded radio call, what was said in the last radio call, what items were stored in the plane's cargo bay, and other critical details.

"We were initially told that the airplane went either on a northern route, which would bring it over land and possible landing sites, or a southern route, but the possibility of a northern route was quickly abandoned.

"Since then, the entire search effort has been focused on a relatively small area of the southern Indian Ocean, a search area that was determined by a never-before-employed analysis of automatic communications between the plane and a communications satellite."

Voice370 said the determination of the area as the only place to search remained questionable, and accused Putrajaya of abandoning hope of finding their loved ones alive early in the search effort.

Recalling the March 24 announcement by the government last year that MH370 had crashed into the southern Indian Ocean and that there was no hope of survivors, Voice370 said some families only received the information by text message.

It added that the announcement was "emotionally devastating" and "unacceptable" at the time, when it was too early to make such a determination, especially given the mistakes, miscalculations, misinformation and lack of crash evidence associated with the search then.

The group also recounted the second blow, which came with little warning when Putrajaya declared on January 29 that the plane was lost in an accident and all on board were killed, and that the rescue effort would be called off.

It expressed concern that the January 29 announcement was the first step towards the government calling off the search effort completely, with the underwater search of the area of the southern Indian Ocean scheduled for completion in May this year.

"We do not accept this declaration and will not give up hope until we have definitive proof of a crash and a determination of location – even if it is just one piece of the wreckage.

"The majority of that area has already been searched with no findings. The search must continue and all options explored if nothing is found in the coming weeks.

"Finding MH370 is important not only for humanitarian reasons, but also to discover out what caused the plane to disappear," they said, expressing fears that MAS and Putrajaya wanted to put the tragedy behind them.

Voice370 said the group harboured no ill-will towards MAS, which is going through a restructuring exercise to recover from the tragedies it suffered last year, including the shooting down of flight MH17 in Ukraine, but added that it could not accept the government's announcements and move on.

The group also asked MAS and its insurer to treat the MH370 families with compassion. They said neither had offered settlements to the families other than a US\$50,000 (RM180,000) advance per family.

"They told us that we will need to prove our losses in accordance with whatever the law in our home countries requires MAS to pay. This plan, however, is in stark contrast to how we understand other families have been treated in recent accidents," it said.

It said that in the TransAsia Flight 222 crash, the airline reportedly offered each family approximately US\$500,000 and did not require the affected families to go through the

painful steps of proving their emotional and financial losses as the investigation unfolded.

"We ask Malaysia Airlines and its insurer to treat us fairly, to not require us to initiate the painful process of obtaining death certificates in order to discuss compensation, and to consider the benefits to not only us, but the future of the airline, if we are treated with compassion," it said.

The group also expressed gratitude to the countries that helped in the search for MH370, and the people around the world who sent their good wishes and sympathies as the families endured the tragedy.

Voice370 is organising "A Day of Remembrance" on Sunday to pay tribute to their missing loved ones at The Square @ Publika in Kuala Lumpur from 3.30pm to 6.30pm. The event will also feature live links to India, France, Australia and New Zealand. – March 5, 2015.

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