

*Newfoundland Air Disaster***DISASTERS****CRASH OF CHARTER AIRCRAFT CARRYING UNITED STATES MILITARY PERSONNEL, AT GANDER, NFLD.**

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sorrow that I rise to inform the House of the tragic loss of life as a result of the crash of a U.S. military charter DC-8 aircraft at Gander, Newfoundland, this morning. On behalf of the Government of Canada, and I am sure of the entire House and all Canadians, I offer deep and heartfelt condolences to those families which have been so tragically touched by this accident.

This morning the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) sent a personal message of condolence to the President of the United States. The Prime Minister also spoke directly with Ambassador Niles to express his sorrow on behalf of the Canadian people.

Earlier today the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Nielsen) called his counterpart in Washington, Mr. Weinberger, to assure Mr. Weinberger of Canada's complete co-operation in the investigation now under way. The Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) also discussed today's tragedy with Mr. Schultz, the U.S. Secretary of State, this morning in Brussels.

The aircraft involved was an Arrow Airlines DC-8 on charter to the U.S. military. On board were 250 U.S. military personnel returning from peacekeeping activities in the Sinai, along with eight crew members. The aircraft was en route from Cairo to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, with refuelling stops at Cologne, Germany, and Gander.

Preliminary information indicates that, after refuelling, the aircraft took off from Gander at approximately 6.45 a.m. local time. After clearing Runway 22, the aircraft crashed in dense bush on the shores of Gander Lake approximately one-quarter of a mile from the airport.

The crash fire rescue units at Gander responded immediately and were at the scene eight minutes from receipt of the alarm. The response consisted of six firefighters, one first response truck, two large foam trucks, one water truck, and one structural fire pumper. Further airport emergency procedures were implemented according to plan, and municipal fire-fighting assistance reported to the scene.

An intensive, all-encompassing independent investigation is now under way to determine the cause of this tragedy. A preliminary Canadian Aviation Safety Board response team is at the scene. A follow-up support team is scheduled to be in Gander later today. The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Administration have also dispatched officials to the scene. Transport Canada's Emergency Air Operations Centre has been in operation since 7 a.m. this morning. Pending fuel analysis, Pit No. 8, the refuelling station used by the aircraft at Gander, has been closed.

● (1405)

In conclusion, I repeat our expression of sorrow and sympathy to all those who have been touched by this tragedy. During this season, when family is of such importance, we mourn with them over the loss of their loved ones.

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber-Port au Port-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the Hon. Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) on behalf of all Canadians for his prompt response and reporting to the House of Commons on the tragic accident which took place in Gander, Newfoundland, this morning. On behalf of the Official Opposition I wish to join with the Minister and all Members of Parliament in expressing our condolences to the people of the United States and, in particular, to those families who lost loved ones this morning.

I note, as the Minister has noted, the response and the efforts made this morning by the Ministry of Transport firefighters in Gander in very difficult circumstances, and also the co-operation which existed with municipal officials in attempting to save the lives. Unfortunately, that was not possible. I thank the Minister for the briefings which his officials and his Department provided this morning. We look forward to receiving continued updates on this sad and tragic event.

I simply say that the Province of Newfoundland has had a long history of association with the U.S. military, with air bases in Goose Bay, Labrador, Stephenville, Saint John's, and the military presence in Gander as well. I say on behalf of all Newfoundlanders that we regret this tragic accident very much. We express on behalf of all Canadians, but in particular the people of our province who have had a close association with the people of the United States, our condolences today.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, we too wish to thank the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) for his statement, and echo his expressions of sorrow to the people of the United States and to the families and relatives of those who perished. Our Leader has personally conveyed our condolences to the American Ambassador.

At this point I wish to pay tribute to something accomplished by the 101st Airborne Division with respect to its role as peacekeepers as a result of the Camp David agreement. Canada has had many years of experience in peacekeeping under the United Nations and knows what it is like to earn recognition throughout the world for being not only a peacemaker but a peacekeeper. That type of accolade is deserved by the 101st Airborne Division peacekeepers who served in the Sinai over the past number of years.

I wish to say to the Minister that we support him in a full investigation and inquiry which will have to result from this accident. We hope that the results will be made public so that we can make greater efforts to ensure that this type of tragedy, no matter what the cause, does not happen again.

Again, on behalf of my colleagues, we express our sincere regrets and condolences to the people of the United States and to the families and friends of those who perished.