

News Release

Communiqué

Department of
External
Affairs



Ministère des
Affaires
extérieures

No. 009

January 18, 1989.

REPORT ON REPEAT SEARCH OFF VENEZUELAN COAST
FOR MISSING VESSEL LONG SHOT

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, said today he regrets that a two-day repeat search off the northern Venezuelan coast for the vessel Long Shot has not turned up any evidence of the missing boat or its passengers. Mr. Clark expressed his sympathy to the families and friends of the persons involved in this tragic accident.

The Venezuelan Coast Guard undertook this latest search in response to a request from the Canadian government to double-check any possibility that the Long Shot and its six passengers might have been marooned in the search area.

The Venezuelan Coast Guard advised the Canadian Embassy in Caracas that the active search was officially terminated at dusk yesterday, Tuesday, January 17.

This repeat search concentrated on an area off the north coast of Venezuela, including a series of islands at about 12 degrees latitude along the coast. The area had been searched previously in an extensive eight-day search-and-rescue operation, coordinated by the United States Coast Guard under a United Nations agreement covering international co-operation and participation in such operations. This original search involved six local countries, with support from the Canadian government for participating private aircraft.

All aircraft and surface vessels in the area remain on the lookout for any evidence of the missing boat.

.../2

Secretary of State
for
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État
aux
Affaires extérieures

Canada

The Long Shot was reported missing in heavy seas off the Grenadines on December 30, 1988 with five Canadians aboard: Frances Eger of Vancouver and her children Vija and Acron; Jonathan Deitcher of Toronto; and Bill O'Brien of Coquitlam, B.C. Danny Soren, an American citizen, was the boat's skipper.

Mr. Clark expressed his appreciation to the Coast Guards and authorities of those countries involved in the extensive search for the missing vessel. He is particularly grateful to the Venezuelans for agreeing to the Canadian government's request that they conduct a repeat search off their northern coast.

SUMMARY OF THE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING BOAT LONG SHOT

On Friday evening, December 30, six people were reported missing enroute by motorboat from Mayreau in the Grenadine Islands to Kingstown, St. Vincent. They were later identified as five Canadians: Jonathan Deitcher of Montreal and Toronto; Frances Eger, her son Acron and daughter Vija of Vancouver; Bill O'Brien also of Vancouver; and one American, Danny Soren, captain of the open nine meter motorboat Long Shot. The weather in the area at the time of the disappearance was blustery with seas running 1½ to 3 metres and winds gusting from 25 to 65 kms per hour.

A privately organized search was begun on Saturday, December 31, but the missing craft could not be located.

On January 1, the United States Coast Guard, the St. Vincent Coast Guard and the Trinidad Coast Guard were alerted and began to take part in the search. Under the United Nations-sponsored Convention on the Safety and Life at Sea, administered by the International Maritime Organization, the search was co-ordinated through the U.S. Coast Guard search-and-rescue centre in Puerto Rico which has international responsibility for providing such services in the area.

On Monday, January 2, the Canadian government learned for the first time that Canadians were involved and that a search was underway. The Canadian High Commissioner in Barbados accredited to St. Vincent and the Grenadines was authorized to underwrite fuel and oil costs for private aircraft participating in the official co-ordinated search. This search continued until January 8.

Throughout the search, the Canadian Government maintained direct contact with the families of the missing persons and with the coast guards of the United States, St. Vincent, Venezuela, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia, and the Netherland Antilles. There was also periodic contact with Colombia and Martinique and with the regional security services in Barbados.

Some 47,494 square nautical miles of ocean and island territory were searched. Shore searches and port checks were made throughout the Grenadines, Grenada and Venezuela. Aircraft were provided at various times by private operators based in St. Vincent and St. Lucia and by government agencies in the United States, Trinidad and Tobago, Curacao and Venezuela.

Surface vessels from the United States, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela and Curacao participated in the search.

Relatives of the missing were assisted by officers of the Canadian High Commission in Barbados and in St. Vincent.

On January 6, the External Affairs Department was informed that the U.S. Coast Guard intended to end its active participation in the search but would continue to provide electronic backup and technical advice.

At a January 8 meeting in Kingstown, St. Vincent, relatives of the missing and many who had participated in the search reached the conclusion, based on currents, wind, time elapsed, etc., that further search efforts were beyond the capability of the resources in St. Vincent. The Government of Martinique and the U.S. Coast Guard in San Juan were approached once more to determine whether further assistance would be provided. Their assessment was that no further direct participation was feasible. On the basis of this information the active search was suspended. However, governments in the area, aircraft and surface vessels continued to maintain an alert for any sign of the missing boat or its passengers.

On Thursday, January 12, Minister Clark said that the Canadian Government would doublecheck that a certain search area off Northern Venezuela, in particular the chain of islands at 12 degrees latitude, had been covered in the extensive search for the Long Shot. The U.S. Coast Guard had said that this particular search area had been examined during the earlier search effort.

However, because some of the relatives of the missing party remained particularly concerned about that specific area having been fully searched, Mr. Clark decided on January 13, for compassionate reasons, to instruct Canada's Ambassador in Caracas to ask the Venezuelan authorities to undertake a re-checking of that area. The Venezuelans agreed to do so.

In following up on the implementation of this recheck over the weekend of January 14-15, Canada's Ambassador in Caracas learned that, while the Venezuelan authorities had alerted vessels and aircraft and also their watch stations on the islands in that specific area to report any evidence of the accident, they had not yet commenced other activity that Canada expected to be included in a recheck of the area.

Accordingly, the Canadian Ambassador made additional representations to the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other Venezuelan authorities involved, to augment the search activity.

As a result, in addition to the measures taken earlier, on January 15 the Venezuelan Coast Guard ordered two of its naval vessels on special alert for evidence of the accident. At that time, the Canadian Ambassador also asked the Venezuelan authorities to undertake a more active search of the area by air.

On Monday, January 16, the Commander of the Venezuelan coast guard confirmed to Canada's Ambassador that a helicopter from one of the naval vessels was being dedicated to rechecking the area in question.

On January 17, our Ambassador in Caracas was informed that the Venezuelan authorities would continue the search for one more day in order to completely cover the relevant waters under their jurisdiction.

Unfortunately, this effort found no sign of the Long Shot or its missing passengers and the Venezuelans terminated their active search at dusk on January 17.