

Boeing jetliner crashes in Ethiopia, killing all 157 passengers and crew

Eddie Haywood
12 March 2019

On Sunday, a commercial aircraft carrying 157 passengers from Ethiopia's capital city of Addis Ababa bound for Nairobi, Kenya crashed shortly after takeoff, killing all on board. The aircraft, a 737 MAX 8, was an upgraded 737 model manufactured by Boeing. The Ethiopian air disaster is the second such catastrophe for the Boeing model. Five months ago, last October, an Indonesian Lion Air jetliner, also a Boeing 737 MAX 8, went down, killing all 189 on board.

Informing the public of the crash, Ethiopian Airlines posted to its Twitter account: "The group CEO who is at the scene right now deeply regrets to confirm there are no survivors." The message was posted next to a photo of Ethiopian Airlines CEO Tewolde GebreMariam at the site of the crashed aircraft holding a piece of the jet's debris.

Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 was bound for Nairobi, taking off from Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa at around 5:30 a.m. Flight conditions were reported as good with clear visibility. Almost immediately after takeoff the aircraft struggled to ascend at an adequate and stable speed, and according to FlightRadar24, the aircraft fluctuated wildly in vertical speed, going from zero feet to 1,472 feet per minute to dropping down to minus 1,920 feet, an extremely unusual pattern for takeoff.

The pilot of the aircraft sent out a distress call to air traffic controllers, who then cleared the jetliner for a return descent to the airport, before losing contact with air traffic control six minutes later and plummeting to the ground near Bishoftu, a town 47.9 kilometres (30 miles) southeast of Addis Ababa. As it slammed into the ground, the aircraft shattered into pieces, leaving a large, smoking crater.

What should have been a two-hour flight from Addis Ababa to Nairobi carried passengers from four

continents, including a contingent of United Nations delegates who were traveling to a week-long United Nations Environment Assembly scheduled for today.

Among the passengers killed were 32 Kenyans, 18 Canadians, nine Ethiopians, eight passengers each from the United States, China, and Italy, seven from Britain, nine from France, and a small number from Egypt, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

The Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft involved in the disastrous crash was recently added to the Ethiopian Airlines fleet as part of the company's expansion of its flights and updated aircraft.

Ethiopian Airlines is the largest airline in Africa, and has enjoyed a reputation for its low accident record compared to other competitor airlines across the continent. Up to 2014, Ethiopian Airlines had experienced only 322 fatalities due to various incidents since 1965.

Speaking to the media regarding the cause of the crash, Ethiopian Airlines chief executive Tewolde GebreMariam said, "At this stage, we cannot rule out anything."

Personnel from the US Federal Aviation Administration, accompanied by staff from the National Transportation Safety Board were at the crash site on Monday, aiding the Ethiopian-led investigation of the disaster. The FAA told media representatives that Boeing would be part of the investigation, and the agency promised it would issue an update to operators of the 737 MAX 8.

On Monday, Ethiopian Airlines reported that the aircraft's digital flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder were recovered. An airline official stated that one of the recorders was partially damaged.

While investigators have not determined the cause of the disaster, according to the Associated Press , a

witness to the crash reported that he saw smoke billowing from the aircraft before it hit the ground.

The witness, Tamrat Abera, told the Associated Press, “Before falling down, the plane rotated two times in the air, and it had some smoke coming from the back, then it hit the ground and exploded. When the villagers and I arrived at the site, there was nothing except some burning and flesh.”

Under similar circumstances, in October, a Lion Air flight departing Jakarta, Indonesia, Flight JT610, also a Boeing 737 MAX 8, went down minutes after takeoff. Before JT610 went down into the Java Sea, its crew sent a distress call to air traffic control reporting a malfunctioning of the aircraft’s data system, which caused the plane to suddenly descend. Moments after the distress call, air traffic control lost contact with its crew.

Amid fears of a widespread equipment defect peculiar to the 737 MAX 8 sparked by the two air disasters in quick succession, airlines in Ethiopia, China and Indonesia grounded all such aircraft pending further investigation. Late Monday, an official with Royal Maroc Air said that Morocco grounded its sole 737 MAX 8 aircraft.

On Monday, Boeing’s stock dropped 12 per cent on the news of the air disaster, recovering slightly by the end of the trading day to minus 7 per cent.

Attempting to assuage fears, Boeing stated that it saw no reason for the company to recall any of its 737 MAX 8 aircraft and declared the model was among its most popular aircraft and used around the world.

Boeing is one of the world’s largest aircraft manufacturers, and the biggest US exporter, posting \$10.5 billion in profits in 2018.

While the direct cause for the air disaster in Ethiopia remains under investigation, the *World Socialist Web Site* in reporting last year’s Lion Air crash documented several equipment issues peculiar to the 737 MAX 8, particularly its automated mechanism Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System, equipment aimed at preventing the aircraft from stalling. If the flight’s data system indicates that there is a risk of stalling, the mechanism can automatically force the plane’s nose down independent of any action on the part of the pilots of the aircraft.

Along with the largest airlines carrying out a coordinated attack to slash wages and benefits of airline

staff, the upgrade of obsolete and aging equipment is being put off in the effort to increase profits, contributing to numerous air disasters over the last several years.

What can be stated for certain is the Ethiopian crash is part of a broader crisis plaguing the transportation industry, as airlines slash operating costs to the bone, risking the lives of airline workers and passengers in order to increase corporate profits.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact