

# *Russians Mourn as Authorities Investigate Plane Crash That Killed 92*

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Moscow, December 26 (RHC)-- A Russian Defense Ministry aircraft on its way to Russia's military base in Syria has crashed in the Black Sea killing all 92 people on board.

The TU-154 aircraft was said to have disappeared from radar shortly after taking off from the Black Sea resort of Sochi. However, search and rescue teams found debris in the Black Sea close to Sochi, some 1.5 kilometers from shore. Both the Russian Emergencies Ministry and the Russian Defense Ministry confirmed that the debris is that of the missing plane.

Defense Ministry spokesman, Major-General Igor Konashenkov, said that "no survivors have been spotted" and that the search operation was continuing around the area. A source told the Ria Novosti/Sputnik news agency that a technical malfunction was to blame, though no official statement has confirmed this.

The flight was carrying 84 passengers and eight flight crew members including, nine Russian journalists, Russian servicemen and at least 60 members from internationally renowned Red Army Choir, who were on their way to celebrate the upcoming New Year with the Russian Air Force at the Heimim air base in

Syria.

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Monday a day of national mourning. According to a statement from the Kremlin, Putin had called on Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev to lead a government investigation commission into the incident to see if safety failures led to the crash.

A passenger list from The Defense Ministry said that Elizaveta Glinka, well known for her charity work and as a member of Putin's advisory human rights council, was on board.

The Russian Investigation Committee has now launched a criminal case into the incident, with local media reports saying that military investigators have seized documents and are interrogating persons who prepared the plane.

"We took comprehensive measures to establish all the circumstances of the incident. We are withdrawing preflight documents, interrogating officials who supervised the flight and the technical personnel responsible for the preflight acquisition and refueling," the Investigation Committee's representative Svetlana Petrenko said.

The Soviet-era TU-154 jet was built in 1983. In 2010, a Polish TU-154 craft also crashed, killing all 96 people on board, including Polish President Lech Kaczynski.

Russia's transport minister was reported as saying it was too early to discuss withdrawing the model from service.

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