



INTERIM STATEMENT

NPF/2022/01/26/INTR/02

Nigerian Safety Investigation Bureau

Interim Statement on the Accident Involving a Bell 429 helicopter owned and operated by Nigeria Police Air Wing with Nationality and Registration marks 5N-MDA which occurred at Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa Airport Bauchi; Nigeria on 26th January, 2022.

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On 26th January, 2022, at 17:54 h, a Bell 429 helicopter owned by Nigeria Police Force and operated by Nigeria Police Air Wing (NPAW) with nationality and registration marks 5N-MDA, departed Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja (DNAA) to Maiduguri on a Visual Flight Rules (VFR) flight plan with a planned technical stop at Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa Airport, Bauchi (DNBC). On board were 6 persons inclusive of 3 crew members (Pilot, Co-pilot and Engineer), and 3 passengers with fuel endurance of 3 hours.

5N-MDA was scheduled to depart DNAA for DNBC for technical stop and layover before proceeding to Maiduguri, next day. 5N-MDA was scheduled as a supplement for the first Helicopter (5N-PEJ), that departed Abuja for Maiduguri earlier same day for administrative activities.

The Pilot was the Pilot Flying (PF) while the Co-pilot was the Pilot Monitoring (PM).

According to the ATC transcript, at 17:45 h, 5N-MDA contacted Abuja Tower and requested for engine start to DNBC. Tower asked "MDA confirm you filed a flight plan?" MDA responded in the affirmative.

Abuja Tower then asked 5N-MDA for her planned Cruise Altitude to DNBC. 5N-MDA responded that they requested for 5500 ft. Tower responded "5.5 ft to DNBC copied, Start-up approved QNH 1009 squawk 2723". 5N-MDA acknowledged.

At 17:50 h, tower cleared 5N-MDA to Abuja Control Zone boundary enroute Bauchi not above 5500 ft and to standby lift. Tower then passed prevailing wind as 110 / 04kts and further cleared 5N-MDA to lift, left turn out after lift. 5N-MDA responded "cleared to lift, left turn out, MDA".

Abuja Tower transmitted the lift up time as 17:54 h to 5N-MDA and requested her to report estimate when ready. 5N-MDA responded "zone out will be at time 05 next hour and destination Bauchi will be at 16:30".

Tower acknowledged and transferred 5N-MDA to Abuja Radar on 127.9 MHz and further instructed to stay clear of DNP4. 5N-MDA acknowledged.

5N-MDA established contact with Abuja Radar. Abuja Radar identified 5N-MDA at 5 NM South East of Abuja Airport and requested for estimate Control Zone boundary out and ETA Bauchi. 5N-MDA acknowledged "zone boundary out will be 06 next hour and Bauchi will be at 37MDA".

According to the crew, Abuja Radar instructed 5N-MDA to contact Jos Tower on 122.7 MHz, 5N-MDA tried to establish contact with Jos Tower, but after several trials, could not establish contact with Jos Tower. 5N-MDA continued with the flight to DNBC as filed.

The crew further stated that at 18:40 h, when they were abeam Jos Airport (DNJO), they tried again to establish two-way communication with Jos Tower, but that was not successful. The flight still continued as filed.

At 18:46 h, 5N-MDA tried to establish initial contact with Bauchi Tower on 124.5 MHz, but no response from Bauchi Tower.

According to the crew, 5N-MDA consistently tried to raise Bauchi Tower at five-minute intervals until the time she reached Bauchi Control Zone boundary, with still no contact. Thereafter, 5N-MDA continued with preparations for landing with the belief that even if the Tower was closed, provided the airport was illuminated, they could land. The crew further stated that at 5 NM to DNBC, there was no sign of any lighting at the airport as the entire airport was in complete darkness. 5N-MDA descended to 3,000 ft and positioning for the runway centreline using Global Positioning System (GPS). They came over the runway and the PM was able to have a visual contact with the runway centreline, but soon after, the PM lost the visual contact with the centreline due to darkness and therefore called for a Go Around. The PF responded and initiated the Go Around, while

the PM pressed the GA button. 5N-MDA executed two Go Around with intention to land, but due to lack of airfield lighting and darkness, the crew could not sight the runway.

During the final approach to land at the third attempt, the PM suddenly saw a tree on its flight path which was neither detected by the Ground Proximity Warning System (GPWS) nor the Terrain Awareness Warning System (TAWS). The crew verified that both systems were certified functional prior to the flight, also the Aural Warning (AW) did not sound and the visual display didn't indicate that the aircraft was approaching an obstacle.

Information available to AIB-N showed that up to 19:00 h, there was no request for extension from NPAW, no information from either Kano ACC or Abuja Tower about late operation and there was also no flight plan message to DNBC. The duty officer closed from duty at 19:00 h.

At about 19:47 h, as the crew pulled up to avoid the tree, one of the Main Rotor blades hit the branches of the tree while the helicopter Tail Rotor struck the tree which resulted in the accident. At that moment when the Skid of the helicopter had contact with the ground, Bauchi Tower called 5N-MDA on radio "Aircraft calling Bauchi tower" and the PM replied "we are on ground." Bauchi Tower further asked "confirm on ground air force side? ", but the crew did not respond.

The crew and passengers disembarked without injury.

The accident occurred at about 19:47 h, night time in Instrument Meteorological Conditions (IMC).

ACTION

The draft final report has been completed. The technical review will be conducted and subsequently, it will be sent to stakeholders for substantial comments.

This interim report is being issued on the 2nd anniversary of the serious incident in accordance with the provisions of ICAO Annex 13.

In accordance with Annex 13 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, Nigerian Safety Investigation (Establishment) Act 2022, Civil Aviation (Investigation of Air Accident and Incidents) Regulations 2023, the sole purpose of this Investigation is to prevent Aviation accidents and serious incidents. It is not the purpose of any such investigation and the associated Investigation report to apportion blame or liability.