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Families of Tu-154 Crash Victims Outraged by 'Low-Key' Funeral

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Candles are placed around a photo of the crashed Tu-154 in memory of victims of the crashed plane in the center of Sochi, Russia, Dec. 25, 2016. **Viktor Klyushin / AP**

The families of soldiers who died in Russia's Tu-154 plane crash on Christmas Day have accused the Defense Ministry of rushing to bury the crash victims "without attracting attention," the Meduza news site reported Friday.

Some relatives allege that the government wants to "distract attention" from their loved-ones' deaths with a low-key funeral.

The Ministry of Defense plans to bury 45 members of the Alexandrov Ensemble, also called the Red Army Choir, at a newly built memorial in the Russian town of Mytishchi in the Moscow region.

The date of the funeral has not been publicized on the Ensemble's website, and relatives claim that they are still unsure when the memorial will take place.

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Nadezhda Stolayara, widow of ensemble soloist Ivan Stolayar, told Meduza that she had tried to organize a funeral at Moscow's Novodevichy Convent, only to be asked who had “given her the right to do away with the Defense Ministry service.”

Stolayara claimed that the Ministry of Defense did not want to “attract attention” to the deaths with a large funeral at a prominent church.

“They're not soldiers, they're not actors, they are our dead relatives,” she told Meduza. “We want to thank the ministry for taking the cost of the funeral upon themselves. But we have the right to bury our deceased relatives with dignity."

Yury Mikhailyuk, a family friend of the deceased Ensemble member Dmitry Litvyakov, also told Meduza that he was unhappy with the Defense Ministry's plans. "They deserve a funeral in Moscow's central cathedral,” he said. “They were know throughout the world, and now they're going to be buried quietly, with a memorial service outside in the cold. It's not right."

Relatives claim that they will only be able to bury the victims outside of official memorial plans if they wish to hold a funeral outside of Moscow.

Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, held a litany for crash victims at the Danilov Monastery in Moscow on Dec. 27. Soldiers' relatives were not in attendance.

The Tu-154 passenger aircraft crashed in the Black Sea near Sochi on Dec.25, killing all 92 people on board.

The plane had been carrying military personnel, journalists, and musicians to a New Year's concert for Russian troops at the Hmeimim air base in Syria.

Among the passengers were 64 members of the iconic Alexandrov Ensemble and prominent philanthropist and charity worker Elizaveta Glinka, also known as Doctor Liza.

Russian Minister of Transport Maxim Sokolov previously told reporters that the crash was likely to have been caused by a technical malfunction, although Ministry of Defense's data maintains that there was no technical error on the aircraft.

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