

# 3 Days After Plane Crash, Brazil's President Orders Changes

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RIO DE JANEIRO, July 20 — Breaking three days of silence after the worst airline disaster in Brazilian history, President [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#) went on television on Friday night to assure worried Brazilians that he had ordered immediate changes in the country's flawed civil aviation system.

The Brazilian government is “taking every step in our power to reduce the risk of new tragedies,” Mr. da Silva said. He also urged Brazilians, who have had to cope with two major disasters in less than 10 months and who are calling for the government to step forward and take responsibility for the crisis, to remain “serene so as not to commit injustices.”

Nearly 200 people died Tuesday night when a TAM Airlines [Airbus](#) skidded off a short, slippery runway in São Paulo and exploded after plowing into an office building and gas station. Last September, 154 people were killed in a midair collision between two planes flying over the Amazon.

Since then, [Brazil](#) has experienced several air traffic controller strikes, some near crashes, the breakdown of radar and other tracking systems, and widespread flight delays and cancellations. After the crash on Tuesday, the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations issued a statement warning that “air safety is currently compromised and is a danger to the traveling public” in Brazil because of government negligence.

In his brief remarks, Mr. da Silva acknowledged that Brazilian aviation is “experiencing difficulties,” as he put it, and promised to modernize the air traffic control system, which had been the focus of the crisis before the crash on Tuesday.

Implicitly rejecting the international association's criticisms, he also argued that Brazil had not fallen short in any aspect of international safety standards.

Mr. da Silva spoke shortly after his chief of staff, Dilma Rousseff, announced what she called "short-term emergency measures" to reduce congestion and "increase the degree of confidence" of passengers at Congonhas Airport, the site of the crash on Tuesday. Congonhas is the busiest airport not just in Brazil, but also in all of South America, with more than 600 takeoffs and landings on an average day.

Under the government's new plan, Congonhas will cease within 60 days to be a hub for airlines and will in the future handle mostly shuttle passengers coming from Rio de Janeiro and other nonstop regional flights. Restrictions were also announced on charter flights to the airport as well as corporate and other private jets.

In addition, the government promised to build a new airport for the São Paulo metropolitan area, which has nearly 20 million residents. Government prosecutors are seeking an injunction to shut Congonhas altogether for safety reasons, a step that the head of the civil aviation agency says is "radical and impractical."

Mr. da Silva has been widely criticized for showing a lack of leadership since the crash on Tuesday. Those complaints increased Friday after one of his closest aides, Marco Aurélio Garcia, was filmed making an obscene gesture to celebrate a television report suggesting that a problem in the plane's turbine may have contributed to the crash.

Mr. Garcia said he made the gesture to express his "indignation" at what he said were attempts to use the disaster to score political points by blaming the government for the crisis.

But that explanation only generated more discord in Congress, whose members are mourning the death in the crash of one of their own, Júlio Redecker, the minority leader of the lower house, who in his last speech last week asked, "Who will be the next victims of the chaos in the air?"

