

June 20, 2017

UMV: 2,6020,201

Passengers On Flight That Caught Fire At FLL In 2015 File Lawsuit Against Airline



By Carey Codd

FORT LAUDERDALE (CBSMiami) – Twenty months ago, a plane full of people got the scare of their lives as their aircraft taxied towards takeoff at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

Carlos Garcia remembers being on the plane as they prepared to fly to Venezuela.

“Suddenly I hear like an explosion,” Garcia said, adding that someone yelled, “Avion en la en fuego — the plane is burning!”

Garcia thought he was going to die.

“I thought this is it for me,” Garcia said.

Garcia slid down a safety slide and made it out alive, as did all the other 100 passengers and crew members on the plane. Still, 21 people suffered minor injuries and one person suffered serious injuries evacuating the plane after it caught fire.

Attorney Steve Marks is representing 77

International Airways and the pilot of the aircraft.

“The trauma never leaves because it’s a near death experience,” Marks said.

The plane still sits at the airport. Federal investigators with the National Transportation Safety Board have not completed their final report into the accident. According to a preliminary report released days after the accident, the NTSB found that a coupling assembly on the main fuel supply line disconnected.

Marks alleges in the lawsuit that Dynamic International Airways and the plane’s pilot were negligent and caused severe mental anguish and fear of death for passengers. He says many of the passengers are OK, but others are terrified to fly and several have had significant setbacks — like losing their jobs and overwhelming anxiety.

“Extreme to serious orthopedic injuries to loss of employment, to a loss — huge economic losses,” he explained.

Marks pointed out the case of one passenger who, because of her injuries, can no longer work as an anesthesiologist in Venezuela.

“With her injuries she can no longer do that job and in Venezuela she was making a significant income by Venezuelan standards,” Marks said.

Garcia said he still has nightmares and it took him months to get on a plane again. He hopes the lawsuit brings better training for flight crews and better communication from airlines — two problems he found through his experience.

“This was a horrible case of lack of maintenance or lack of care,” Garcia said. “This is something that should not happen. This is something that is totally preventable.”

Marks said he hoped to settle these cases, but believes the insurers for the airline have stonewalled them and that led to his filing of the lawsuit late last week.

“They just stonewalled,” he said. “I have never in over 30 years of handling thousands of aviation cases seen this occur like this.”

CBS4 News reached out to officials at Dynamic International Airways for a comment on the lawsuit and have not heard back.