

January 11, 2020
Ukraine International Airlines
Press briefing
Script – English translation

[00:00:41 – *Yevhenii Dykhne*:]

“I am Yevhenii Dykhne, President of Ukraine International Airlines (UIA). I am proud of my status, proud of the status of president of the company, which, for 27 years, has always considered the safety of passenger flights its main priority.

“From the very beginning, we were sure that there was no pilot error or technical malfunction of the aircraft through the company’s fault; we checked ourselves against all internal regulations, checked ourselves and became convinced that there must have been an external factor.

“When we scheduled today’s news conference, we had a different agenda. We wanted to tell you how bitter these three days have been for us. In fact, just three days have been for us, I do not know, like three weeks or three months – so many events, such a burden on each of the crisis staff members who organized the work with the relatives of the deceased passengers, with the families of our dear crew members.

“But this morning, a message from Tehran changed our agenda. I might say that we knew this would happen, but we were relieved to receive today’s information, as it excludes any speculations that the company had done anything wrong where safety is concerned. We were and are a safe company, a reliable company with the most, I’m not afraid to say, qualified personnel all over Ukraine and with our own – which is not so frequent in Ukraine – with our own technical center here at Boryspil Airport. We have every opportunity to secure our main priority – safety.

“During these three days, the company’s crisis center has done a great deal of work. Work is under way in the countries whose passengers were on board our jetliner. In Canada, a center is already up and running to cooperate with the relatives of the victims. In Iran, a special center has been set up at the representative office for interaction with the families of those killed in the crash. A hotline has been launched, which is already being used by relatives – Europeans and Ukrainians. The company is working separately with the relatives of our crew members.

“Nevertheless, I believe that, taking into account the new agenda, we should address the question we are very often asked: why did the airline operate flights to Tehran? Why didn’t the airline halt its operations? I would like to say that, in terms how it works, what is clear and understandable for us as civil aviation professionals, is not always clear to the general public. Civil aviation flights are carried out based on permits issued by two countries: the one to which the flights are made, the space of which is normatively governed by government agencies, aviation services, and the state aviation service of the country under whose flag the airline operates its flights.

“At the time the flight left Boryspil Airport, the airline had no information about any possible threats. When it left Tehran airport, exactly the same thing, and the airline did not have any information, and no decisions on the part of responsible administrations were brought to our attention.

“For example, during the tensions between India and Pakistan, the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority announced a halt to flights into Pakistani airspace. In addition, all the airlines in the world comply with this

requirement as best they can. There are established international rules of conduct in the field of civil aviation, how airlines should act.

"I would like to use this broad, huge international audience to offer the deepest condolences on behalf of UIA Airlines and on my own behalf to all the passengers and all the relatives of the passengers on our flight, who are all over the world. We have not yet made contact with everyone. Our deepest sincere condolences. We are feeling the deep sorrow together with the relatives of our passengers and the relatives of our staff, our dear crew.

"I would like the airline's Vice President for Flight Operations to comment on my words and the airline's actions during the take-off from Tehran airport. What is this about? It is related to the fact that now, even in the statement put out by Iran itself, we see hints that our crew acted independently and somehow not in the way it might have done. Please, Ihor, tell us what was going on in the sky over Tehran airport before, during and after the flight, and how our crew acted – it is important."

[00:09:40; *Ihor Sosnovsky:*]

"Good afternoon! Ihor Sosnovsky, again, Vice President of Ukraine International Airlines. I have been working at UIA for 27 years, more than 20 of them in charge of flight operations. I have been working for UIA since day one, I am proud of it.

"The company has had an excellent safety record since November 1992. We are doing our best to ensure this in terms of people's professionalism, their social security and creation of an atmosphere in which it is pleasant and good to work. Big words – people make a difference – are even more important on the plane itself; they take on a different meaning, a much brighter and, in the cockpit, even more vivid one.

"So I would like you to hear once again the names of the people who were in the cockpit of Flight 752: Captain Volodymyr Gaponenko with 11,600 flight hours, Oleksiy Naumkin – instructor / instructor pilot, 12,000 hours flying experience, and co-pilot Serhii Khomenko, who had 7,600 hours of flight time.

"The flight attendants who were on board include Kateryna Statnik, who has been flying with UIA for 6 and a half years, Valeriia Ovcharuk – 3 years 8 months, Ihor Matkov devoted 11 and a half years to UIA. He had successfully passed a competition to become a pilot and was supposed to take a training course in the spring. Then there were Yuliia Solohub – 1 year and 8 months, Mariia Mykytiuk – 2 years and 8 months, Denys Lykhno – 1 year and 7 months. I have listed these figures and thousands of flight hours so you might understand that these people had made hundreds of takeoffs and landings every year, including at Tehran airport, to which UIA planes have been flying five times a week for over five years.

"So the flight on that day was nothing new to the UIA staff. It was an ordinary, routine flight from Tehran to Kyiv. People came to the plane, prepared it, received permission to start engines, took off from the airfield according to the traffic controller's permission; after take-off, they went on air, contrary to what the Iranians said – that they didn't get in touch. They did go on air, reported 'Take off!' in an absolutely calm voice, received further permission to perform the flight and proceeded strictly according to the traffic controller's permission.

"In our information era, I think, well, it's even stupid to try to hide something so, if you turn on your mobile phones now, turn on the flight radar app, you can see the location, to the second, of every plane you want to. In general, neither you nor we need these flight data recorders or cockpit voice records we are waiting for. On the ground, there remained communications with the air traffic control service, which was guiding

the crew, which can show and prove the correctness of the crew's actions but the Flight Radar apps show everything that was happening during the flight. Would you please put up a few slides?

"This slide shows takeoffs from Tehran airport by different airlines on the day we took off. The blue lines are we. This is the Qatari flight that turned right, this is the KK flight. We will now show all these flights that were performed on this day before our takeoff. Notice that the plane is strictly on the route line, then it started turning right, and after that, we said goodbye to it. This is the trajectory of all other planes departing from Tehran airport on that day.

"May I have the next slide, please? This is, according to our information, PS 752 departures from 2 November to 8 January. This is all our flights, by our airline, that we have made since then. The red marks the movement of our plane and there was no route deviation that might be insinuated.

"May I have the next slide, please? About flight altitude. These are the trajectories of our airline's flights, flight height profiles. In red, we see our flight 752 again for 8 January. Please note that you do not need much intelligence to create these slides: this is the most common Flight Radar app, which you can open and then check all my words to the second.

"May I have the next slide, please? This is a table of the flights made that day before us. If you look at the names and numbers of the flights, their departure times, please note – we took off at 2:42, Qatar took off at 2:09 before us. [00:15:22 *video interrupted for a few seconds*].... [00:15:37] ... regarding the airport shutdown, or shooting with toys to the side, no matter where. The pilots did not know, they could not know because there was no warning. The airport was working normally; it is not the business of civil aviation pilots to know who was shooting, from where and at what targets.

"And another slide. This is the table of flights after us. One hour and forty minutes later, and one hour and thirty-eight minutes after us, two Iranian companies took off and then the airport continued to operate normally, as if nothing had happened.

"So, to end all this conversation, I did not want to say loud words at all but I have to say it. I would like to say that I join the President of our country, Mr. Zelensky, in demanding that the Iranian authorities fully, unconditionally recognize what happened, without any 'but', 'conditional' and so on ... since they must take full responsibility for what happened to our people, all honor to them, their professionalism and quality

[00:17:56 – *the presenter in Ukrainian invites journalists to ask questions and explains the procedure*]

[00:18:48 – *question from a reporter:*]

"Mr Dykhne, what compensation does Ukraine expect? Maybe some amounts have been mentioned? In addition, Mr. Sosnovsky – Iran knew about the escalation of the military conflict. Why did it not close its skies? What do you think? Why didn't they? Would they have had to pay some kind of compensation, a penalty? Is it a monetary issue or did they make some cynical decision knowing about the escalation? How do you see what happened? Thank you."

[00:18:27 – *Dykhne:*]

"Thank you for your question. We are now, as a company, engaged in compulsory legal proceedings over settling the consequences of this disaster. Therefore, unfortunately, I cannot comment on the compensation expectations, on insurance payments to passengers. All I know is that we are working on

many issues with seven jurisdictions, and the progress of all our legal proceedings will be covered in due course. Right now I can't tell you anything about that, I'm sorry."

[00:19:35 – *presenter speaking Ukrainian*]

[00:20:18 – *a reporter asks a question in Ukrainian*]

[00:20:50 – *Dykhne:*]

"I am sure this disaster will not have a catastrophic impact on the airline's routine operations. The company will be operating as normal. We will cope with the economic difficulties caused by this catastrophe; we have checked this and know it is true. That is why I am confident that the long way we have to go will be travelled first gone by the people who were assigned to the crisis center in order not to affect the regular work of the company. Second, I am sure that the eighth of January will signify change the company. We will continue to live with the burden of this disaster. We will never be able to change what has happened, change the way we feel about it. That is why I am certain that we will be psychologically stronger and will appreciate and love their staff even more than before."

[00:22:40 – *Sosnovsky:*]

"On your question, I think there is a risk management system in the company, that is, to put it simply, the safest plane is the one that stands rather than flies, and the safest pilot is the one that sits in his kitchen. Therefore, in order for the planes to fly, you have to operate them, and they will fly anyway, as we have to earn money and earn profit: after all, we are a commercial company. Yet this system allows you to decide where you should not fly at all. That is, if we are in a red zone, we will certainly not fly there."

[00:23:20 – *a question in Ukrainian*]

[00:23:21 – *Sosnovsky:*]

"Absolutely. No, we have excellent stuff now, today. In terms of staff training, I can say now that not only will we not be changing anything but we will try to keep doing what we are doing. In terms of determining where to fly. This is an entire integrated system, which is determined by the company as a whole, including security, ground staff, technical staff, flight staff; it is not that simple, so we will not change anything. We're going to keep doing what we are doing."

[00:24:11 – *a question in Ukrainian*]

[00:24:13 – *Dykhne:*]

"This was a very simple routine delay situation. There was a very large amount of luggage and carry-on baggage on this flight. Therefore, the captain of the aircraft, having determined the take-off weight of the plane and seeing the discrepancy, made a decision to unload some luggage from the luggage compartments. That's why the flight was delayed."

[00:24:50 – *a question in Ukrainian*]

[00:24:52 – *Dykhne:*]

"Look, we can't release information about people who didn't board the flight right now. Because it is currently being used for certain legal activities carried out by the law enforcement agencies that are

investigating crash theories. What Iran said today – we do not yet have documentary proof of it. The version of a possible terrorist attack is still being analyzed by law enforcement agencies and we are meeting with them, providing relevant information, statements about what happened, which passengers were flying when and from where, when they flew to Tehran, with us or not with us, why they did not board the flight: all the information we have, we have given to the law enforcement agencies, so we certainly have no right to comment on it at this time. If this version is rejected by the law enforcement agencies as invalid, this information will definitely be made available.”

[00:26:05 – *a question from a reporter:*]

“Would you please tell us what the last message was from the pilots to ground services? In addition, when exactly did you learn that this was definitely not a technical problem, definitely not a crew error, because you could have received the information before Iran issued its statement and maybe before Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau issued his statement? Thank you.”

[00:26:13 – *Dykhne:*]

“We have a lot of serious and qualified specialists in our company (we are a big company). Therefore, naturally, we have simulated the situation for ourselves, any option that could have happened. For ourselves, we have definitely concluded that, first; there was certainly an external factor. Our analysis eliminated all other possible scenarios. Therefore, we were sure from the beginning.

“There was a statement that there was no contacts with the plane. Until we learned from the members of the investigation commission representing the company in Tehran that they heard with their own ears this information of the crew’s communications with the traffic controllers, when the communications with the traffic controllers were examined, as part of the investigation, we certainly saw for sure that we were right. That is, we could not have heard our plane. Our plane was heard by Tehran airport. We made sure that the dialogue with the airport was conducted up to the last second of the incident. Until the very last second. Permission was given for the route; permission was given for the turn, and so on. So all this is in the investigation files now. And all these documents will probably be available in due course.”

[00:28:30 – *question from the audience:*]

“What was the last message?”

[00:28:31 – *Dykhne:*]

“Look, I can’t comment on every word in the pilots’ dialogue because we don’t have any documentary evidence. We have the words of our three employees. In addition, we are confident of their honesty and their correctness in this matter. Ihor, would you like to add something?”

[00:29:20 – *Sosnovsky:*]

“I just wanted to add: The words are, in fact, the typical ground phraseology: ‘and then, gain height and turn.’ They answered ‘gain height and turn.’ That is it. It means there would have been no further communications after that, only if something broke down. There’s no other way.”

[00:29:30 – *question from a reporter:*]

"Hello. Arman Nazaryan, Kyiv TV Channel. The situation is a difficult one. Fortunately, at least we know who was to blame. They themselves have confessed it. I am saying this because I do not want my question to sound like a presumption of any kind of guilt on the part of Ukraine. We all understand, yes, what occurred. However, we are talking about the death of people, about a tragedy. Therefore, I cannot but raise this issue. Your company has become a victim of decisions, to a certain extent, of political leaders. Everyone knew about the conflict in Iran, right? The Americans knew that such a danger was coming; Iran certainly knew that to a certain extent. Ukraine, I am sure, was also aware of that – that Iran is not safe. Tell us, don't you think that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine are responsible for not deciding to ban, for example, departures from or flights to Ukraine? Thank you."

[00:30:20 – *Dykhne answers:*]

"My personal opinion. I believe that the Ukrainian state authorities acted by the rules. There is enough information that it is not permitted to fly to this zone, as you think, and this is confirmed by what Ihor showed to us on the slides. Airlines from all over the world flew there before us and are flying there after us. Unfortunately, we can say that our plane was in the wrong place at the wrong time. This could have been any other plane that was operating at that time at Tehran airport. Open the Flight Radar app and you will see that the airspace over Tehran is open. All the airlines that operate there are flying there now. Therefore, this was not an individual decision. There is established international practice for determining this. In the first place, it is determined by the country that regulates the air space. If we speak about when and who could have known from the media what was going on there, we did not know for sure. I think that many, many people in Ukraine did not know what was going on there. There was information about attacks on US bases in Iraq. However, who knew what, from where and how? I mean, civil aviation has nothing to do with all this and it has nothing to do with regulation. So I, this my personal opinion, I don't think it's the government's fault, let alone ours."

[00:32:50 – *question in Ukrainian*]

[00:33:20 – *Dykhne answers:*]

"It's hard for me to comment on this for two reasons. First, our people are not just the members of our team, but also another 42 people from Ukraine. Until they return to Ukraine, we will refrain from commenting on how the investigation is going on. For reasons that are clear to you, I hope. We, of course, receive information from our people. This is why they participate in the work of this commission. We certainly note for ourselves all possible strange things and deviations in the work of this commission. But we won't comment on that now."

"Regarding the return of the crash victims' bodies to their families. The bodies are in four different hospitals. According to my information, to date, the medical experts do not have the necessary tools and equipment. They are from Iran, and their relatives are there. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry is doing its best to bring the bodies of the dead Ukrainians back to Ukraine. In addition, there is hope that they will return along with the cargo plane that brought the commission and is currently there in Iran. This is a cargo plane, it has the capacity, but we do not know how ready Iran will be to complete all the formalities, organizational matters, how long it will take. Fortunately, this is the first time we have experienced this situation. In addition, experience of other incidents of this kind is not so similar for us to be able to draw conclusions and say that if so, then so. Every country has its own way, and Iran is a complicated country."

[00:36:30 – Sosnovsky:]

“According to the investigation rules proposed by the ICAO, the party conducting the investigation, in this case the country where it occurred, Iran, must submit an additional report within thirty days. That is, roughly speaking, within a month, by 8 February.”

[00:37:09 – *question in English, which is then translated into Ukrainian:*]

Reporter from CNN – “It sounds as if you have made it quite clear that both Ukrainian officials and Iranian officials failed to warn the airline of the potential danger in the sky so why should you trust that they will do better in the future? Isn’t there some obligation for the airline to do its own research or even follow media reports that there might be danger or recent airstrikes in the given area? Then suddenly the President makes a clear warning that he expects compensation from Iran. If Iran won’t pay, will the airline give the passengers’ families compensation?”

[00:35:15 – *Dykhne:*]

“We trust international civil aviation institutions. These are certified international bodies in every country. They follow the same rules. In Ukraine, in Iran, in Europe, in the United States. Therefore, we cannot question the actions of these bodies until international institutions question their actions.

“So the airline is operating the same way as it did before, according to international rules. As for compensation: I understand that the President was talking about intergovernmental negotiations on this issue, in which the airline will probably not be the subject. Of course, we support our President’s position. All other compensation, insurance payments, which are stipulated by law, which are the responsibility of the airline, will be made in accordance with all international rules and the insurance agreements in place. And we take this issue with serious responsibility; we know our responsibility to passengers. We will comply with it in full.”

[00:40:10 – *Sosnovsky in English:*]

“I want to add to this answer if you want – Hello? I just want to add something to the question you asked. The answer is like this. We trust the Iranian government, that’s why we stopped flying.”

[*CNN reporter asking:*] “Why should you trust them in the future, why ...”

[*Sosnovsky in English continues, interrupting the asker:*]

“There’s no talk about future, we stopped flying. We stopped flying over the territory of Iran... We stopped flying to Iran at this time, and all other routes, let us say Dubai, we changed the routes, and we do not fly over the Iranian state. So, we’ll talk about the trust in the future.”

[*CNN reporter asking:*] “Should your policies change?”

[*Sosnovsky in English continues, interrupting the asker:*] “It changed already... it changed already... it changed already...”

[*CNN reporter asking:*] “Should you have done some research you know, even just following media reports about missile strikes in the area?”

[*Sosnovsky in English:*] "We'll do it for sure, but to do that we have to do risk assessment, we'll do it for sure."

[*CNN reporter asking:*] "But would you have done things in exactly the same way if you could do it again, with all the things you know?"

[*Sosnovsky in English:*] "Necessary what we have to do, we'll do."

[*CNN reporter asking:*] "I'm asking if it would be the same decision to fly today, given the same circumstances?"

[*Sosnovsky in English:*] "As you can see what I'm talking about. We have stopped flying to Iran based on our trust to them. I think this is the answer because we've changed our policy."

[00:41:40 – *a question in Ukrainian*]

[00:41:41 – *Dykhne answers:*]

"You just heard the comments from the Vice President for Flight Operations. He has just been showing all our standard historic routes. This flight was within the framework of our historic routes, and there were no deviations. Moreover, when the flight traffic is determined, first of all, in the area of the airport, these routes for arrival and departure are determined by Tehran airport and posted in a special system. That is, there are certain routes for which the airport is responsible. And our flight was one of the routes determined by the airport and operated within the scope of the commands received from the traffic controller, which we have just discussed. There was contact, there were communications with the traffic controller, the controller was giving instructions on how to proceed on the route; these are absolutely standard instructions that are almost the same for each takeoff from Tehran. So there could have been no insinuations concerning route changes. Thank you."

[00:43:27 – *a question from the audience, indistinctly, then the presenter says:*]

"I'm sorry, the interpreter can't hear you and your colleagues can't hear you. So please raise your hands in advance, no need to shout out. Please... Okay, I'm giving you the microphone now."

[00:43:46 – *Sosnovsky:*]

"I heard it anyway. I think I will answer before you talk. I have no right to say what they said. For now. It is not fair, it is not right. Wait a minute. Just because it is investigative material, I have no right to say. I just answered the man that there was a standard phraseology for taking off and leaving the airfield area, which the crew performed to the letter."

[00:44:14 – *a reporter:*]

"Iran hints that the plane changed route, and that's why..."

[00:44:16 – *Sosnovsky:*]

"Once again, that the plane changed course, we can see it on our Flight Radar app. You see it on the Flight Radar app."

[00:44:16 – *someone from the audience:*]

"This is not true!"

[00:44:19 – *the reporter verifies his question:*]

"I'm asking for comments; they're hinting that the course was changed, so they shot the plane down."

[00:44:21 – *Sosnovsky:*]

"Please pay attention to the picture again, I beg you. The standard exit from Tehran's airfield is 7,000 feet in a straight line. After crossing an altitude of 6,000 feet, normally, in Iran, they give you a course to some point. If you look at all the previous schemes, it has always been like this for five years. This scheme is no different from all the previous ones. After crossing 6,000 feet, the plane turned towards the corresponding point of exit on to the route. [*The presenter starts talking, but Sosnovsky interrupts her.*] If you want you can look again at this picture, the previous one and all our turns. This is all our turns, starting from 2 November 2019."

[00:45:01 – *question from the audience:*]

"So the Iranian reports are not confirmed, the course was not changed?"

[00:45:08 – *Sosnovsky:*]

"I didn't say that. I am sorry. I did not say the course was not changed. There are certain things that have not been confirmed. No. I said it was not confirmed from the start that the Iranian allegations meant for the entire media... that the crew had not made contact at all since takeoff. Well, that's for sure."

[00:45:28 – *question from the audience:*]

"So was the course changed or not?"

[00:45:29 – *Sosnovsky:*]

"One more time. You can see that the course was changed. It's changed 15 degrees to the right, where it should go, according to the traffic controller's command."

[00:45:40 – *the presenter speaks in the Ukrainian*]

[*A reporter asks:*]

"I have a question. First, what is the atmosphere in the company now? How do people feel? That is my first question. And second, have you noticed a drop in the number of your airline's flight bookings? If so, will you claim compensation from Iran as an element of damages, and how much?"

[00:46:08 – *Dykhne answers:*]

"It's been three days, so we can't assess our sales. How much, roughly speaking, our passengers' trust might have been shaken. I think that today's message from the Iranian authorities should confirm that we are right about the safety of our flights. And I hope that passengers will continue to have sufficient confidence in us. With regard to possible compensation, I am not prepared to discuss that issue right now. These are legal matters, which will be handled in a series of consultations with the state authorities of Ukraine. Not by the company itself."

[00:47:30 – *indistinct voices from the audience:*]

[00:47:32 – *Dykhne continues:*]

Our company staff, of course, is grieving, like all the people of Ukraine. I think that this is not only our grief and not only our trouble. However, it is the staff who are used to, trained and know how to do their job properly. And I really hope that this misfortune will add cohesion and patriotism to the company, thus further improving its work in all aspects.

[00:48:14 – *a question:*]

“Would you please tell us, you mentioned that you were planning to... well, that there’s hope that the bodies might be brought back by the cargo plane? Will it be all the bodies or just the bodies of the Ukrainian victims?”

[00:48:29 – *Dykhne:*]

“I can’t tell you how it’s going to be. I just don’t know. I mean, I do not know how ... what the commission will be doing there... I mean, it will be decided on the spot. In Iran. I know that was the original intention. It was on that basis that the cargo plane was sent there. And there is hope, if all the information is processed quickly and Iran is ready to give up the victims’ bodies, Ukraine is ready to take them. If the Ukrainian cargo plane brings all the bodies to Ukraine, as an airline company we are ready to transport them to those cities where the relatives of the victims from Kyiv are.”
