

'Distraught' British Air India families 'given the wrong bodies'

By Tim Sigsworth

FAMILIES of British victims of the Air India plane crash have been given the wrong bodies, it has been claimed.

In one case, a funeral was abandoned after it emerged the coffin contained the wrong body, according to the *Daily Mail*.

In another, the remains of two victims were said to have been "commingled" in the same coffin and had to be separated before they were buried.

Fifty-two of the 261 people who died in the disaster last month were British citizens. The errors were identified by Dr Fiona Wilcox, the Inner West London coroner, the newspaper reported.

James Healy-Pratt, a lawyer representing several British families bereaved by the crash, said the mistakes had left relatives "distraught".

"I've been sitting down in the homes of these lovely British families over the last month, and the first thing they want is their loved ones back," Mr Healy-Pratt

told the newspaper. "But some of them have got the wrong remains and they are clearly distraught over this."

"It has been going on for a couple of weeks (and) I think these families deserve an explanation."

The lawyer added that the families who received the wrong body had been left "in limbo".

He said: "If [it] isn't their relative, the question is, who is it in that coffin? Presumably it's another passenger and their relatives have been given the

wrong remains. The coroner also has a problem because she has an unidentified person in her jurisdiction."

The remains found by search and rescue teams at the crash site were badly burnt, mutilated or fragmented.

Some were identified by DNA and others by dental records.

Families could not verify the Indian authorities' identifications themselves and a number received remains from Ahmedabad's civil hospital in an undignified plastic container, the newspaper

reported. Altaf Taju, from Blackburn, Lancashire, lost his parents Adam, 72 and Hasina, 70, perished and also their son-on-law Altafhusen Patel, 51.

"Nobody looked at the remains," he said. "We weren't allowed to. They just said, 'This is your mother or father', and gave us a paper label with an ID number on it. We had to take their word for it."

"It's horrific that this could have happened, but what could anyone do?"

Mr Taju was not affected by the mix-ups because his relatives were buried in

India. The bodies of British victims were repatriated by Air India.

Mr Healy-Pratt added: "On the known evidence, the chain of custody of these lost loved ones was unacceptably poor."

"We are investigating the causes of those failures and demanding answers on behalf of these deserving British families."

"We await formal responses from Air India, and their emergency response contractors – Kenyons International Emergency Services."