

CNN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTIANE AMANPOUR (24/03/2015) – TRANSCRIPT

It's his first international interview since the plane crash and amidst organizing help for the desperate families and providing medical, forensic and support teams to the crash site, [President Mas] joined me from the presidential palace there in Barcelona.

(BEGIN INTERVIEW)

CHRISTIANE AMANPOUR: Mr. President, thank you for joining me. And of course we are all very, very sorry about this huge loss. Can you tell me what exactly you're able to do for these grieving and desperate families right now?

PRESIDENT ARTUR MAS: Well, the first thing, of course, is to convey our most sincere condolences to the families of the victims. The Catalan government is cooperating with the Spanish government and the French government to organize everything; for instance, to make available to the families the transportation to France or provide medical doctors or psychologists, everything needed in these circumstances and in these cases.

AMANPOUR: Can you tell us a little bit more about who the Spanish passengers were? Do you know at all who the families were?

MAS: Well, in fact, the list is still not public. So there are some speculations in the sense. But we know for certain that some of the people were Spanish, some Catalan; we are in touch with some families but the complete list is not available at this time because the company, Germanwings, hasn't made the list public.

AMANPOUR: It's obviously an incredibly shocking thing that happened and it's a very hard to reach location. I understand people are traveling there. Your officials are traveling there. Are you going there? And how will you actually get to the site?

MAS: In fact, this morning, when we knew that the accident had happened, I decided to send the Vice President of the Catalan government to France, to the site of the accident. I know that she is traveling to France right now. The Minister of Domestic Affairs and the Catalan minister of Territory went to the airport of Barcelona to help and to coordinate everything. And personally, I will go to the site of the accident, to France tomorrow morning, together with the Spanish prime minister, Mr. Rajoy. I was in touch

with Mr. Rajoy this afternoon and we decided to go together to France. And I know that we will coincide there with Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Hollande.

AMANPOUR: It's obviously a big act of solidarity for you to go with the Prime Minister Rajoy. How will you actually get there because it is so remote? They're saying you can't reach by road; it's only maybe helicopters, maybe even skiing as far as one can. How will you get to the site?

MAS: This is something, Christiane, I don't know right now. I don't know because, as you said, it is not easy to get there. But I'm sure that tomorrow we will find a way to get there, the easiest way, and try to know the reality and to have a better knowledge of what happened with this accident.

AMANPOUR: What about the black box? We understand from the company that at least one of the black boxes has been found and the company's ruling out terrorism or at least it's saying it was an accident. Are you also getting that message? Is that what you're hearing as well? Do you have other suspicions?

MAS: No, we don't have other suspicions so this is the message we also got during the day. So this is what we know right now.

AMANPOUR: Will Spain help in the recovery? And how?

MAS: Spain and Catalonia are going to help in this recovery. But of course the first thing is to help the families of the victims. This is what we are doing right now. This is the first priority we have. And after that, we will help the recovery together with the French authorities.

AMANPOUR: And how did you learn of this? And what did you do immediately as you heard what happened?

MAS: As a matter of fact, there was a meeting of the Catalan Cabinet this morning, like every Tuesday, and while we were meeting, well, there was this news and very quickly we decided to ask the Vice President to go to France to be in touch with the French authorities. We also asked two ministers of the Catalan government to go to the airport

of Barcelona to -- well, to be close to the families of the victims and organize all the different things that are specifically needed in these circumstances.

AMANPOUR: It's obviously a huge shock, not just for you and your country but for all the other nations that have been touched by this, with their nationals. What is the sense around your office, around Catalonia in Spain today? How are people taking this and feeling?

MAS: As you can perfectly understand, we are very sad. We are very upset. This has been the worst accident in the last years, in our country and in Europe, since the accident of the Concorde in the year 2000. So we are really shocked by this accident. But as I said before, our first and only priority right now is to be close to the families of the victims. This is what we have to do now.

AMANPOUR: I know you have a huge amount of work to get to. Thank you so much for giving us this time, Artur Mas, President of Catalonia, thank you for joining me tonight.

MAS: Thank you.