

Beat: News

Bus and truck collide head-on in central Zambia, killing 51

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USPA News - Fifty-one people were killed Thursday when a truck slammed into a passenger bus in central Zambia while trying to avoid a collision with another vehicle, making it the deadliest traffic accident in the history of the African country, officials said Friday. The accident happened just after 7 a.m. local time on Thursday when an elderly man driving a Toyota Land Cruiser tried to overtake a Zambia Postal Service bus near the central town of Chibombo.

An oncoming truck attempted to avoid a collision with the Toyota Land Cruiser, causing it to crash into the bus. A police spokeswoman said 51 people were killed, including 49 people on board the bus and 2 people in the truck, while 16 others were injured. A statement from the country's presidential office previously placed the death toll at 53, while some media reports claimed as many as 59 people were killed. Photos and video footage from the scene on the two-lane highway showed the mangled wreckage of the two vehicles, with the front of the bus crushed and the heavy goods truck almost completely destroyed. Bloodied and lifeless bodies were also seen lying next to the wreckage. President Michael Sata said he was "extremely saddened" by the loss of life in Thursday's accident. "Allow me on behalf of my Cabinet, the First Lady and indeed on my own behalf to convey my deepest condolences to the bereaved families," he said. "We pray that the Lord Almighty grants the bereaved families comfort and strength during this very painful period." Sata ordered the Zambia Police Service and the Road Traffic and Safety Agency (RTSA) to promptly investigate the exact cause of the accident. "It's regrettable that the country has continued to lose valuable citizens through fatal road accidents," he said in a statement issued by his office. A police spokeswoman said the driver of the Toyota Land Cruiser, identified as a 74-year-old man, has been charged with 51 counts of causing death by dangerous driving. Investigators believe the man misjudged the distance with the oncoming truck before he attempted to overtake the bus. Thursday's collision was the worst traffic accident in the history of Zambia, where road accidents are common and claim more than 1,200 lives every year. The vast majority of accidents are mainly caused by reckless driving, dangerous roads and the poor maintenance of buses which are often overloaded. In April 2005, 44 students from a high school were killed when the truck they were traveling in overturned at Kawambwa in northern Zambia. And at least 34 people were killed in July 2011 when an overloaded passenger bus collided head-on with a truck in Nyimba district of eastern Zambia.

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