



IRISH COURT GROUNDS CONGOLESE PLANE OVER DEBT ROW

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An Irish court has grounded a plane owned by Democratic Republic of Congo's new national [airline](#) after plaintiffs sought its seizure to recuperate an outstanding debt from the government, Congo's prime minister and local media said.

Congo's government recently purchased two used Airbus A320s for the launch of Congo Airways, expected before the end of this year.

The first of the airline's two planes, which are due to initially serve eight domestic destinations, arrived in the capital Kinshasa last month. But Prime Minister Augustin Matata Ponyo confirmed Irish news reports that the second has been grounded.

"The plane is in the custody of judicial authorities in Dublin at the request of a Congolese who is claiming a debt from (Congo)," Matata Ponyo tweeted on Sunday.

"It's sad for a Congolese who seizes a national patrimony against personal interests. Where is the patriotism!" he added.

Congo's government spokesman and the managing director of Congo Airways could not be immediately reached for comment.

An article in the Irish Independent on Friday said the High Court grounded the plane at Dublin airport after John Dormer Tyson and Ilunga Jean Mukendi, two American citizens, argued that the Congolese government owed them US\$11.5 million.

Mukendi is of Congolese origin.

The plane had been undergoing refurbishments in Dublin before its delivery.

The debt, the two men claimed, is related to a 2007 arbitration decision involving the ownership of two diamond mines they purchased in Congo, the newspaper wrote.

Congo Airways is entirely owned by public Congolese entities and is meant to replace the country's last national carrier, which went bankrupt in 2003.

The government has promised higher safety standards and lower prices in a country with few internal routes and whose domestic carriers are all banned from operating inside the European Union for safety reasons.

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