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Gay rights champion Mariela Castro alive, not on missing Algeria plane

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Gay rights champion Mariela Castro is alive after she was rumored to be aboard the missing Air Algerie plane.

Ouagadougou Airport claimed the advocate, the niece of former Cuban leader Fidel Castro, was among the 110 passengers on board.

In a statement, it said: 'Among the passengers of VOL AH5017, there were two EU civil servants of French nationality based in Ouagadougou and Mariela Castro, the niece of Fidel Castro, the former Cuban leader.'

But on Telesur TV, a Latin American channel, Castro went on air to say she was alive and well.

She said she was in Havana where she presented her doctorate thesis on trans individuals to experts. She also paid tribute to the dozens of people believed to be dead.

Aviation authorities said the plane vanished as it crossed Mali. The pilots reportedly contacted Niger's control tower in Niamey to change course because they were approaching a storm at 01.38am.

It was supposed to land in Algiers at 5.10am, but never reached its destination. It is believed to have crashed in Kidal, northern Mali.

Two French fighter jets based in Africa have been deployed and are attempting to locate the missing plane.