

International Commemoration Service, Auditorio de Tenerife, March 27, 2007

Speech by Mr. Leo van Wijk, President and CEO of KLM.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 27th March 1977, Tenerife. A date and a place which are indelibly etched on our memories. Today, thirty years later, we come together on Tenerife itself.

Many of you met five years ago on this day in 2002, when family and friends of the victims, emergency response staff, employees and former employees of Holland International, Pan Am and KLM came together in Amsterdam to remember the terrible day on which two Boeing 747s collided – one operated by PanAm, the other by KLM.

That meeting, organized by the recently-formed Tenerife Victims Families Foundation, was a remarkable gathering. It was an extremely emotional day, but one which brought comfort to many. The chairman of the foundation, Jan Groenewoud, believed that it should have a sequel. The idea of placing a permanent memorial here on Tenerife was conceived.

And so we find ourselves here today, five years on and exactly thirty years since the disaster itself. Here in Santa Cruz, our thoughts once again turn to those we lost. There has never been a meeting of this nature here on Tenerife itself, and never before have we had the opportunity to remember our loved ones alongside the Spanish emergency workers and local residents. Everyone on this island was shocked and deeply affected by the events of 27 March 1977. It is therefore fitting that they should now have the opportunity to stand alongside others from all over the world, to share their experiences, and to join us in remembering the victims.

Today's gathering is partly the result of the Foundation's desire to place a permanent memorial on Tenerife itself. That desire has given you all the courage and fortitude to come so close to the exact spot at which your loved ones were taken from you. I have nothing but the deepest respect for that.

I would like to compliment Jan Groenewoud, the other committee members of the Tenerife Victims Families Foundation, and everyone else who has made today's event possible. In particular, we must thank the Spanish authorities for having permitted us to meet here and for having done so much to facilitate our visit.

This afternoon sees the official unveiling of the International Tenerife Memorial, and hence the culmination of much hard work over the past few years. For many people, the events of 27 March 1977 serve as a stark reminder of the fragility of the human existence, and of the fact that life can sometimes meet an abrupt end.

The sculpture which is now to grace Mesa Mota is in the form of a spiral staircase which itself comes to an abrupt end. However, it also stands as a symbol of endlessness.

The continuous spiral movement of the sculpture will remind us of the tragedy, of the grief, and of the fragility of our existence. But I hope that the memorial will also be a source of great comfort to you, and that this staircase will take you a step nearer to closure.

Thank you.

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