COURT RELEASES CONGO PLANE GROUNDED IN DEBT ROW

News / Airlines

A commercial jet belonging to Democratic Republic of **Congo**'s new national carrier has been released by an Irish **court** after it was grounded over a **debt row** with two US investors.

The Airbus A320 is one of two planes recently purchased by the government for the launch of Congo Airways, expected before the end of this year. It was being painted at Dublin airport ahead of its arrival in Congo.

Ireland's High Court grounded the plane last month after the private investors from a company called Miminco said Congo owed them USD$11.5 million to repay assets seized by government forces from diamond mines they controlled in the 1990s.

"The Irish judge found in our favour this afternoon. The plane has been freed and it can return (to Congo) starting tomorrow," Justice Minister Alexis Thambwe said on state-run television.

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The court found that the debt, which Congo acknowledges, did not concern Congo Airways, Thambwe said.

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.

Air travel in Congo is dogged by high prices, lax safety standards and poor service. All domestic carriers are banned from operating inside the European Union for safety reasons.

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