

Beat: News

Brazil: Owners, band members arrested after nightclub fire kills 231

-, 29.01.2013, 03:23 Time

USPA News - Four men were arrested Monday after a fire broke out over the weekend at a crowded nightclub in southern Brazil, killing more than 230 people in one of the worst ever fires in the history of South America, local police and prosecutors said. The fire broke out at around 2 a.m. local time on Sunday at the Kiss nightclub in Santa Maria, a city in Brazil's southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Authorities said around 2,000 people were inside the building at the time of the fire, far exceeding the club's maximum capacity of 1,000. Investigators believe the fire begun when pyrotechnics during a band's concert went wrong, causing material in the ceiling to catch fire. Survivors have also accused security guards of blocking the club's only exit as people tried to flee, as it is usual practice for visitors to pay their bill when they leave a club. Police and prosecutors said four men were arrested on Monday, including the two owners of the nightclub and two band members. No charges were immediately filed against the men, but authorities said they could be held without charges for up to five days as they are questioned. Speaking at a press conference, Brazilian Health Minister Alexandre Padilha said a majority of the 231 victims died due to smoke inhalation. Some of the victims were also killed when they were caught up in a stampede as hundreds of people desperately tried to flee the building. In addition to the fatalities, fourteen people who were seriously injured by burns were hospitalized in Porto Alegre. Another 92 people were taken to local hospitals in Santa Maria where they were being treated for a range of injuries, but many were suffering from smoke-related injuries. Local authorities said most of the victims were between the ages of 16 and 20, but several minors may also have been killed after they used fake IDs to enter the nightclub. Among those killed are also security guards and a band member who reentered the nightclub in an attempt to retrieve his musical instrument. Sunday's fire is one of the worst fires in the history of South America and comes as Brazil prepares to host the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-463/brazil-owners-band-members-arrested-after-nightclub-fire-kills-231.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619