

THE LEVESON INQUIRY

**EXHIBIT GHC4 TO
WITNESS STATEMENT OF
GILES HUMPHRY CROWN**

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British boy, 11, feared to be among victims of school coach disaster

Alex Spillius in Lommel Richard Alleyne in Sierre and Martin Banks in Brussels

A BRITISH schoolboy is feared to be among the victims of a bus crash that killed 22 children in Switzerland.

Last night, the parents of Sebastian Bowles were understood to be awaiting formal confirmation of their son's death.

The 11-year-old and his family moved to Belgium from London two years ago. His father Edward is understood to work at Standard Chartered Bank and his mother, Ann, is Belgian.

The schoolboy reportedly told his parents during the school ski trip that "it's really great here" and that he was having the time of his life.

He wrote the excited message on a school "blog" as the end of the holiday approached saying "Dearest Mama, Papa, Helena and Flopsy" – and told them: "I can already ski quite well."

Yesterday, both parents arrived in Switzerland as the investigation into the cause of the crash continued.

Investigators are looking into the possibility that the driver of the coach was trying to put on a DVD film seconds before impact.

Young survivors of the accident have told their parents that he was seen trying to insert the disc as they drove along the A9 motorway in Switzerland on the way home from a skiing holiday.

The fear is that the driver – one of two who died – was distracted and lost control. It could explain why he hit a kerb and veered across two lanes and smashed into the right-angled shape of the emergency stop area on a relatively straight road in a two-mile stretch of tunnel.

The Belgian newspaper Het Laatste Nieuws reported the claim yesterday. It is known that children had watched the film Avatar on their outward journey to the Swiss ski resort of Val d'Anniviers. Renato Kalbermatten, a spokesman for the Swiss police, confirmed that the theory was being examined, although CCTV footage "did not make the situation clear".

Yves Mannaerts, the director of the Belgian Coach Operators Federation, said nothing would be ruled out of his organisation's investigation. It has hired a French expert in crash situations to conduct the inquiry. He admitted that there was no set procedure for drivers changing DVDs or CDs during a journey. "It depends on the driver and the demands of the customers," he said. "There is no set normal practice but of course the major task of the driver is to drive, not to put on DVDs."

He said sometimes the spare driver would operate the entertainment system.

It is still not known which driver was at the wheel at the time of the accident. Both were experienced. Paul van de Velde, 52, had worked with the family-owned Top Tours company for seven years while Geert Michiels, 35, was an experienced public bus driver in his second season with the firm.

The names of the 22 children had not been released officially last night but it is known that they came from two schools: Stetske junior school in Lommel and St Lambertus in Leuven.

Photographs of 15 children, all aged 11 and 12, and two teachers from Stetske were put up in Lommel city hall.

Mourners filed solemnly into the hall to sign a condolences register and write messages to the departed. Thousands attended a vigil outside the Roman Catholic church next to the school.

Local reports backed up by friends and colleagues have named the six adults who died as Frank van Kerckhove, 40, a teacher at St Lambertus, Monique van Bocxlaer, 70, a teaching assistant at the school, Raymond Theunis, 54, and Veerie van Heukelom from Stekske school as well as the two drivers.

The grandfather of a 12-year-old boy on the coach confirmed that he had died. Jos Daman, from Leuven, told the Flemish paper *Het Laatste Nieuws* that his grandson Bavo Daman, from St Lambertus school, had suffered fatal injuries in the crash. He said that the boy's parents had flown to the crash scene on Wednesday where they were given the news.

"We are still waiting for more news but this is obviously totally devastating for all of us," he said.

Bavo had been sitting on the back seat of the coach with his best friend, 12-year-old Timon Waeterloos, who survived the accident but suffered two broken legs. Timon's parents, Joost and Gitte Waeterloos, said they were agonising how to tell their son that his friend was dead.

Mrs Waterloos said: "I haven't a clue how we are going to break the news to him. They were so close, like brothers really. It will break his heart to know that Bavo has died."

Twenty-four children were injured in the accident. Last night three – a girl and two boys – remained critically ill in comas in University Hospital, Lausanne.

Medics said more than 50 operations, carried out by 150 medical staff, were performed on 16 of the injured children.

Eight were expected to be discharged from hospital by the weekend.

Police said of the 28 dead, 19 had been formally identified by their parents and the remaining nine identifications were "in progress".

Tom Cooremans, the head Top Tours, said the vehicle – an Altano model of the Vanhool make – had been fully inspected in October, 2011. Mr Cooremans, who rejected the DVD theory, said he drove the leading coach of three on the trip and was not fully aware of the extent of the tragedy until he returned to Belgium. "This is just devastating. We feel we have lost members of our family and there are so many questions. I have no direct answer from all my experience to what happened," he said at a press conference in Aarschot where the company is based.

Many of the bodies are due to be returned to Belgium today, when the country will hold a day of national mourning.

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

COMPANY: STANDARD CHARTERED PLC

NEWS SUBJECT: (Accidents & Injuries(1AC02); Automobile Crime(1AU99); Children(1CH89); Crime(1CR87); Health & Family(1HE30); Parents & Parenting(1PA25); Social Issues(1SO05))

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