

3 planes returned to Venezuela

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HAVANA (Reuter) — All three Venezuelan airliners hijacked on a hopscotch tour around Central America took off yesterday for Caracas, minus the hijackers.

Before leaving, the pilots of the commandeered planes voiced complaints about the attitudes of authorities in four countries where the aircraft had been forced to land.

Two days after the ordeal began on domestic Venezuelan flights, the three planes left Jose Marti Airport with an estimated total of 150 passengers on board.

About 12 hijackers, who had demanded a \$10-million ransom and the release of 30 political prisoners in Venezuela, turned themselves over to Cuban security Tuesday night upon landing. Cuban authorities said they would be tried before "a competent tribunal".

The countries criticized by the pilots were Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Frank Hendel, pilot of the Avenza Airlines Boeing 727, said he received "very bad treatment in Colombia and in Guatemala it was even worse." He said when his plane landed with the hijackers demanding fuel, Government authorities used delaying tactics that created a critical situation inside the plane.

The pilot of one of the two Aeropostal airline DC-9's, Jose Vidal, said the Honduran authorities answered his request for fuel by telling him, "The air strip is free. Leave."

He said the attitudes of the Colombian and Honduran authorities endangered the lives of the passengers and crew.

The three aircraft originally carried more than 250 people but many were freed in return for fuel. At various times one or other of the planes landed in Colombia, the Dutch Antilles island of Aruba, Honduras, Guatemala and Panama.

Roger Smith, a British engineer who was in the other Aeropostal DC-9 said that when his aircraft arrived in El Salvador, a truck filled with soldiers carrying automatic weapons parked in front of it on the runway.

He said the hijackers ordered the pilot at gunpoint to take off. The plane did, according to Mr. Smith, with only one engine functioning and narrowly missed the truck.

The nationalities of the hijackers is still unclear, but many crew members and passengers

believed they were Venezuelans. Passengers said the hijackers spoke about "liberation struggles in Puerto Rico, El Salvador and Haiti" and the three groups of hijackers were named after revolutionary movements in those nations.

When the Cuban Government announced the arrest of the hijackers late Tuesday night, it said the "hijackers had at no time the intention of going to Cuba and were forced to do so because of the technical state of the aircraft."