
GEODIS completes complex, oversized break bulk shipment in Colombia with Antonov AN-124 Aircraft

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GEODIS announced it completed a complex air cargo transport featuring oversized thermocompressors via Antonov AN-124, the world's largest cargo aircraft.

Arriving from Lisbon, the aircraft undertook 13 flights over seven days, transporting urgently needed oversized freight in Colombia on behalf of a leading client.

The just-in-time logistics operation entailed transporting 249 pieces of oversized, overweight cargo totaling 776 tons and 4,455 cubic meters to the southeast part of Colombia. GEODIS originally planned to mobilize the cargo in Cartagena and transport it to the end destination via the La Orquídea Bridge in Boyacá, the only road transport option for freight of this size and weight along the route. However, when the bridge collapsed in August 2023, GEODIS had to quickly develop and execute an alternative solution to transport the cargo via air to complete the urgent project on time.

The monumental project involved a complex planning and negotiation process between GEODIS and Antonov. After evaluating various air charter solutions, GEODIS identified the Antonov AN-124 as the only aircraft option that would be large enough to mobilize the cargo given its extra dimension and weight characteristics. The planning process included securing the aircraft given its limited availability amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Antonov's focus on humanitarian aid.

“With 13 total flights, including a long international journey and 12 domestic trips, this unprecedented operation faced consistent challenges to overcome,” said Carlos Palacios, Manager Director of GEODIS in Colombia. “Despite the complexities, our team at GEODIS and our collaborators—including Antonov, the Colombian Air Force and the individual airports involved—were able to successfully come together to keep essential materials moving across the country at a critical time for our client's operations.”

Once securing the Antonov AN-124, GEODIS evaluated and defined specific airports that would meet the technical conditions required to maneuver this type of aircraft. Ultimately, GEODIS selected Barranquilla (AOL) and Apiay (AOD) in Colombia due to the validation of payload and technical conditions of the runway. Additionally, in Apiay (a military base for the Colombian Aerospace Force), GEODIS facilitated a study to

determine the correct maneuvers for landing and takeoff, the location of the aircraft as to not interrupt military base operations, fuel supply capacity and the availability of an alternate facility during ground time.

Given the scope of the operation both at origin and destination, the cargo was prepared in Cartagena and transported by land to Barranquilla before being transported on the Antonov AN-124. While the Antonov AN-124 has a capacity of 100 tons, the maximum payload accepted was 65 tons to land in Apiay. Therefore, GEODIS oversaw adjustments to the flight plans and load with Antonov, which ultimately meant transporting the cargo over 12 domestic flights. GEODIS and Antonov adjusted the load to mobilize the 12 separate pieces, including removing crates from the parts, placing 12 additional lashing points inside the aircraft, removing stairs to fit the biggest piece of cargo onto the plane and more.

“Given the constant changes, urgency of timeline and sensitive nature of the cargo, this project marks one of the biggest accomplishments for our GEODIS in Colombia team,” said Palacios. “Together with our collaborators, we proved that with flexibility and world-class talent we can overcome extreme challenges and execute exceptional air operations on behalf of our clients”.

(GEODIS)