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USA: Relatives of trade center missing cling to hope.

By Paul Holmes

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NEW YORK, Sept 17 (Reuters) - Nana Minkah would telephone his sister Susana Banfo each morning before leaving home for his job at the 107th floor Windows on the World restaurant in the World Trade Center. As New York returned to work on Monday after the attacks that felled the 110-story twin towers, Banfo still could not believe that the big brother who lived two blocks from her in the Bronx probably would never call again.

"He always called me to say he was going to work," Banfo, 35, said. "Since Tuesday, he didn't call me yet."

New York, and with it the rest of the nation, shifted focus on Monday from paralyzing grief to a resolve to move on to a semblance of normal life, six days after two hijacked planes slammed into the towers, killing possibly thousands of people. But for many of those seeking loved ones among the 5,422 listed as missing in the concrete and steel pile that was the World Trade Center, the clock has remained frozen at the moment they heard on September 11 that the first of two hijacked airliners sliced into Tower One. None of the 70 employees in the Windows on the World restaurant three stories below the summit of Tower One, where 42-year-old Minkah worked as a banqueting manager, has been accounted for.

"I still believe in God that my brother will come back alive," Banfo, clutching a photograph of Minkah, said outside an assistance center for relatives and friends of the missing.

Flanked by two of her other brothers, she said the family had so far ignored official calls on relatives to provide personal effects of the missing or their own saliva samples as material for DNA tests to help identify the dead.

"I didn't do that because I believe he is alive."

The assistance center moved on Monday to a warehouse at Pier 94 on the Hudson River, from less spacious premises at the Armory on Lexington Avenue on the Manhattan's east side. Hundreds of posters with photographs and personal details of those missing remained pinned to the walls there. Rescue officials say prospects are fading that any survivors will be pulled from the rubble of the World Trade Center - no one has been found alive since Wednesday - and have noted that some bodies may never be recovered.

Despite that, families of the missing cling to hope that their loved ones escaped the apocalypse.

"Miracles happen," said Anthony Gardner, 25, standing down at Pier 94 with a placard that carried photos of his brother Harvey, 35, and Harvey's friend and co-worker at General Telecom on the 83rd floor of Tower One, Joyce Carpeneto, 40.

"I just hold on to my faith. I just believe that he will come home to us somehow, whether alive or not," Gardner said.

He has wrapped himself in his patriotism as a shield against the unbearable reality that confronts him.

"This has only made our country stronger," Gardner said of the attacks by the hijacked planes on New York and on the Pentagon near Washington. A fourth hijacked passenger aircraft, whose destination was not known, crashed into a field in Pennsylvania.

"My brother and his friend and those people who are missing, if they're gone, they're heroes. They died in battle and need to be honored," Gardner said.

Heidi Snow, one of the many volunteer counselors at the assistance center, knows how the relatives feel.

Five years ago, her French fiance Michel Breistroff died in the crash of TWA flight 800, a tragedy that led her to found Access, a volunteer emotional support group for friends and families of air disaster victims and survivors.

"For the first month until his body was recovered there was a lot of hope," she said. "In a sense it's a crutch...and it's not the role of the people here to take that away.

"One of the hardest things with air disasters is that the bodies are sometimes never recovered and that's the similarity here. It makes it harder for people not to be able to have a burial or a place to go to," Snow said.

That possibility is something Christine Barton finds impossible to contemplate in her quest for solace.

Barton, 40, left her home in Stuart, Florida, last Tuesday and drove 26 hours to Manhattan to search for her 23-year-old daughter Jeanmarie Wallendorf, who worked on the 88th and 89th floors of Tower Two.

"It's my kid. I made her. I gave birth to her. I raised here. She's mine, not New York's. They don't have the right to hold her," Barton said. "If there was a little, God forbid, piece of her left, I'm taking my daughter back. No matter what."