

Original: ENGLISH



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Tragedy of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 18, 2014

We gather here today sick with sadness. We ache for the families of the 298 victims who have lost their lives. We mourn with the families and with the loved ones. And we, in the U.S. delegation, have just learned that one of the victims was a dual Dutch/U.S. citizen. Our thoughts and prayers are with them all. Along with Secretary Kerry, we also offer our heartfelt sympathies and support to the governments and peoples of the countries whose citizens were on board—many of which are OSCE participating States and partners.

The victims of this tragedy and their families deserve a credible international investigation. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has called for this, as have many other world leaders. The Ukrainian government has welcomed international support and expertise. In line with declaration we have just adopted, all participating States should take whatever steps they can to support immediate safe access to the crash site and the work of technical and forensic experts, including the efforts of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

We are pleased to learn that the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) was quickly deployed to the crash site and in that respect will continue to be a trusted representative of the international community, as it monitors the securing of, and access to, the crash site in advance of the arrival of Ukrainian and international investigation experts. We look to the trilateral contact group, working with the SMM, to facilitate and implement agreement with separatists and others in the region to allow safe access for international relief and investigative efforts. The SMM's immediate presence on the scene can bring comfort to victims' families that an international presence is on hand, as we await the arrival of representatives of ICAO and other international organizations and individual nations. The United States Government stands ready to assist with a credible, international investigation.

We welcome yesterday's video-teleconference among members of the Trilateral Contact Group and separatist representatives in which the separatists committed to:

- closing off the crash site and allowing local Ukrainian authorities to start preparations for the recovery of the bodies of the victims;
- providing safe access and security guarantees to the national investigation commission, including international investigators invited by the government of Ukraine, in the area under separatist control;
- providing safe access and security guarantees to OSCE monitors; and
- cooperating with the relevant authorities of Ukraine on all practical questions arising in the course of the recovery and investigation.

The U.S. continues to support the work of the contact group to further negotiations for an immediate ceasefire. The Ukrainian unilateral 10 day ceasefire was not met with reciprocal action—it is well past time for a mutual ceasefire that is adhered to by all.

Because the crash site is in Russia-backed separatist-controlled territory, we are calling on Russia to use its influence with the separatists to ensure safe, full, and unfettered access to the crash site for OSCE monitors and international organizations assisting with the recovery of remains and the investigation. This is an international tragedy involving citizens of several countries. We reiterate that this tragic loss of life must not be compounded by an avoidable delay in access to the area. Because the separatists are fully supported by Russia, we intend to hold Russia fully responsible for the separatists' commitments.

In closing, Mr. Chair, let me state what should be obvious to all around this table.

While it may take us some time to establish who bears responsibility for yesterday's tragedy, the facts about what is happening in eastern Ukraine are clear for all to see. Separatist forces – backed by the Russian government – continue to destabilize the country, terrorize civilians, and undermine the efforts of the country's elected leaders to build a democratic Ukraine that is stable, unified, secure, and able to determine its own future.

While Russia says that it seeks peace in Ukraine, its actions point in the other direction. Time after time, we have provided clear evidence of Russia's continued support to the separatists. Time after time, we have called on the Russian government to de-escalate the situation, by stopping the flow of fighters and weapons into Ukraine, pressing separatists to agree to a cease-fire and release all hostages, and supporting a roadmap for negotiations. Time after time, President Putin has committed to working toward dialogue and peace: in Geneva in April, Normandy in June, Berlin earlier this month. And every single time, he has broken that commitment.

The last few weeks have been no exception. Here is what we know:

- Russia has roughly doubled the number of tanks, armored vehicles, and rocket launchers in southwest Russia. More advanced air defense systems have also arrived.
- Moscow has recently transferred some Soviet-era tanks and artillery to the separatists; several military vehicles crossed the border in recent weeks.
- After regaining control of several Ukrainian cities last week, Ukrainian officials discovered caches of weapons that they assess came from Russia, including MANPADS, mines, grenades, vehicles, and a pontoon bridge.
- Ukrainian forces have discovered large amounts of other Russian-provided military equipment, including accompanying documentation verifying its Russian origin, in the areas they have re-taken from the separatists.
- Recruiting efforts for separatist fighters are expanding inside Russia and separatists are looking for volunteers with experience operating heavy weapons such as tanks and air defenses. Russia has allowed officials from the so-called "Donetsk Peoples' Republic" to establish a recruiting office in Moscow.
- Russia continues to redeploy additional forces extremely close to the Ukrainian border.

An end to this crisis must come from this tragedy. We owe that to the victims of this senseless act. The separatists and their Russian backers owe that to the innocents who lost their lives yesterday and in all the weeks before. We and all those who lost citizens must demand no less.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.