

[news] Transport Minister's Statement On MH17 Tragedy
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KUALA LUMPUR, July 18 (Bernama) -- Following is the statement from Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai during a press conference on the Malaysia Airlines (MAS) MH17 flight tragedy at the Sama-Sama Hotel, Sepang, today:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I will now give a brief statement on the loss of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17.

"On behalf of the Malaysian government, and the Malaysian people, I would like to offer my deepest sympathies and condolences to the families of those who lost their lives. Our hearts go out to those who have been affected by this tragedy.

"In recent hours, officials in the US and the Ukraine have indicated that Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 was shot down. Should this be confirmed, it would contravene international law, and be an outrage against human decency.

"Malaysia condemns any such action in the strongest possible terms, and calls for those responsible to be swiftly brought to justice.

INVESTIGATION

"As set out in the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Annex 13, the Ukrainian government will institute the investigation into the circumstances of the accident, and be responsible for the conduct of the investigation.

"Updates on the investigation will be provided to the next-of-kin by the investigating authority, as per the ICAO guidelines.

"Malaysia offers its full and unqualified support to the investigation. Malaysia has been formally invited to participate, and will send two senior accredited representatives to assist.

"Malaysia also welcomes calls for an independent international investigation into the incident, and urges all parties to co-operate to ensure such an investigation can be completed.

"It is essential that the integrity of the crash site be preserved, out of respect for the investigation and for those who have died.

NEXT OF KIN

"Malaysia Airlines takes its responsibilities to the next-of-kin seriously. The airline has arranged for some 40 staff to be flown to Amsterdam, to support the families.

"Separately, as the Prime Minister announced this morning, Malaysia will today dispatch a Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team to Kiev.

"In total, 62 people - 30 SMART team members, 15 medical staff, 10 Royal Malaysia Air Force representatives, five Malaysia Airlines staff, two Department of Civil Aviation staff - are travelling to Kiev.

PASSENGERS

"Earlier today, Malaysia Airlines released a list of those on board the flight and their nationalities. The list included 41 passengers whose nationality could not be verified at the time, as they were in transit from previous flights, and had not entered passport control in Amsterdam.

"Twenty-one of these passengers' nationalities have now been verified, and 20 remain to be verified. The latest breakdown of known nationalities of those on board is as follows:

173 from the Netherlands

44 Malaysians

27 Australians

12 Indonesians

9 from the United Kingdom

4 Germans

4 Belgians

3 Filipinos

1 Canadian

1 New Zealander

"Malaysia Airlines is in the process of notifying the next-of-kin of those on board. Once all families have been contacted, the passenger manifest will be released. In addition, Malaysia Airlines will release the cargo manifest later today.

"Responsibility for releasing further information about the investigation rests with the investigating authority, which in this case is the Ukrainian National Bureau of Air Accidents

and Incidents Investigation with Civil Aircraft.

FLIGHT PATH

"The flight path taken by MH17 was approved by the International Civil Aviation Organisation, and by the countries whose airspace the route passed through. And the International Air Transportation Association has also stated that the airspace the aircraft was traversing was unrestricted.

"15 out of 16 airlines in the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines fly this route over Ukraine. European airlines also use the same route, and traverse the same airspace. In the hours before the incident, a number of other passenger aircraft from different carriers used the same route.

"There were no last-minute instructions given to the pilots of MH17 to change the route of the flight.

"Earlier today, Malaysia Airlines released a statement on the aircraft's service record, which showed the aircraft had a clean bill of health. They have also confirmed that all the aircraft's systems were functioning normally. ACARS and the aircraft's transponders were working and transmitting as normal.

"Ladies and gentlemen,

"Before I take your questions, I would like to reiterate Malaysia's condemnation of any attack on innocent civilians; its support for an independent international investigation; and most of all, its sympathies with those affected by this tragedy.

MH17 was carrying 298 passengers and crew. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families at what must be an incredibly difficult time.

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