

Family members of MH17 victims view wreckage at Dutch base
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The first of around 500 relatives of those killed in the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine visited the wreckage at a Dutch airbase yesterday, investigators said.

The wreckage was brought to the Gilze-Rijen base in the southern Netherlands late last year as part of a probe into what exactly shot down the Boeing 777 in July, killing all 298 people on board.

Around two-thirds of those killed were Dutch, while citizens from a total of 11 countries died in the disaster.

Pieces of the plane's fuselage have been laid out in hangars at the base where they can be viewed by the bereaved until Saturday and by journalists yesterday.

Some 50 relatives saw the trucks carrying the wreckage arrive at the base in December, but this is the first time they can see the plane parts up close.

"There are about 500 people coming, not only from the Netherlands but also from other countries," said Sara Vernooij of the Dutch Safety Board (OVV), which is leading the probe into the crash.

Ukraine and the West accuse Russia of supplying pro-Kremlin insurgents with the missile that downed the jet. But Moscow and the separatists deny responsibility and have instead pointed the finger at Kiev.

The Dutch are leading international efforts towards a criminal prosecution, if the culprits can be identified.

International investigators from Ukraine, Malaysia, Australia, the United States, Britain and Russia have already carried out a preliminary investigation of the wreckage, the OVV said.

The three-dimensional reconstruction of part of the aircraft will begin later this month, focusing on the cockpit and business class section, the OVV said.

A preliminary report in September, which apportioned no blame, said the plane "broke up in the air probably as the result of structural damage caused by a large number of high-energy objects that penetrated the aircraft from outside". – AFP, March 4, 2015.

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