

US And UN "Welcome" Dutch Safety Board's Final Report On MH17 Aircraft Shooting Down

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By Manik Mehta

WASHINGTON, Oct 14 (Bernama) -- The US administration has "welcomed" the final report by the Dutch Safety Board on the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 last year in Eastern Ukraine.

Mark Toner, the deputy spokesman of the Department of State, issued on Tuesday a statement to that effect.

"We welcome the important findings of the Dutch Safety Board in its final report on the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17. This report is the result of an independent, transparent and rigorous 15-month investigation completed in accordance with Annex 13 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, and includes the contributions from a wide array of experts from many countries, including the United States," Toner said, adding that the Dutch Safety Board's "report validates what Secretary of State Kerry first said more than a year ago (that) MH17 was shot down by a BUK surface-to-air missile."

Toner reminded that Secretary Kerry had already made it clear that the United States had detected a missile launch from the separatist-controlled territory at the time of the shooting down, and had drawn attention to verified conversations among separatist leaders bragging about shooting down an aircraft in the immediate aftermath of this tragic event.

"We also take note of the finding of the Dutch Safety Board's recommendation regarding the handling of airspace during armed conflicts, and we are studying them.

"Our sympathy and thoughts remain with the families and friends of the MH17 victims," the US State Department's deputy spokesman said.

US diplomats have also been following the reactions forthcoming from Malaysia to the Dutch Safety Board's final report. One diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Bernama that it was right that Malaysia should call for accountability from those responsible for the shooting down of the MH17 aircraft.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said that those responsible for shooting down the aircraft should be held accountable.

Najib had also said that as the investigation by the Dutch Safety Board had revealed that the plane was hit by a Russian-made BUK missile fired from rebel-held territory in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine, the on-going criminal investigation must provide definitive answers and allow Malaysia to pursue the strongest action possible against those responsible.

The Dutch Safety Board chairman, Tjibbe Joustra, confirmed that the MH17 was indeed

shot down by a BUK surface-to-air missile, as he presented the final report. The missile's warhead detonated on the left side of the aircraft's cockpit.

MH17 was shot down when it had reached an altitude of 30,000ft, and crashed in an area affected by the armed conflict in Ukraine near the Russian border on July 17, 2014 killing all 283 passengers and 15 crew onboard the Boeing 777 aircraft, which was flying to Kuala Lumpur from Amsterdam.

Five countries, Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Ukraine made a formal bid on July 14, 2015 to urge the UN Security Council (UNSC) to set up an international criminal tribunal to bring to justice the perpetrators of the shooting down of the MH17 aircraft but Russia exercised its veto in the UNSC to torpedo the proposal on July 30.

Parallel to the US reaction, the UN-affiliated International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) also welcomed Tuesday the Dutch Safety Board's final report.

"(The) ICAO and its Member States responded rapidly in the aftermath of MH17 to address some important immediate concerns," said ICAO Council President, Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu, in a statement.

"Now that the Dutch Safety Board has issued its Final Report, ICAO will be reviewing its recommendations applicable to our organisation and responding as needed to ensure that air transport continues to be the safest way to travel," Aliu continued, noting that investigations under Annex 13 of the Chicago Convention, as the ICAO Convention is also called, are "directly related to improving flight safety, and not to the apportioning of liability or blame."

Aliu's statement also points out that in the immediate aftermath of the MH17 "tragedy," the ICAO quickly established a special Task Force on risks to civil aviation arising from conflict zones. The Task Force recommended that ICAO should establish an online repository where States could share their conflict zone information more effectively, and where the public could also access it. ICAO launched the new online tool in April this year.

"Any fatality is one too many in civil aviation," stressed Aliu. "Our sector is constantly improving its safety performance through a wide range of collaborative global measures relating to data sharing and the strategic prioritisation of flight safety risks, and accident investigation Final Reports play a very valuable part in that process."

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also welcomed the release of the final report, noting that it conformed to Security Council resolution 2166 (2014) calling for accountability, full access to the site of the crash, and a halt to military activities.

"The United Nations has from the very beginning fully supported and shared in the determination of the international community to 'seek the truth about what happened,' Ban said through his spokesperson.

He called for full accountability and to bring to justice those responsible.

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