

**Ukraine should have closed air space over war zone, says Dutch Safety Board
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Ukrainian authorities should have closed the air space over the eastern region wracked by fighting with pro-Russian separatists, the official inquiry into the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 air disaster found today.

"We have concluded as a precaution there was sufficient reason for the Ukrainian authorities to close the air space above the eastern part of their country," the chairman of the Dutch Safety Board, Tjibbe Joustra, told reporters.

The Dutch-led probe concluded that the Malaysia Airlines flight, headed from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, was shot down by a Russian-made BUK missile fired from war-torn eastern Ukraine.

All 298 people – most of them Dutch and including some 80 children – died in the Boeing 777 crash on July 17, 2014.

Joustra hit out at Ukrainian authorities for allowing commercial aircraft to continue flying over the separatist region despite the dangers involved.

On the day flight MH17 was blown out of the skies, some 160 commercial flights overflew the area, the inquiry said.

But the head of Kiev's part of the investigation called the conclusion "groundless" because Kiev had been in the process of closing airspace to flights that could be hit by shorter-range ground-to-air missiles available to the militia.

"Ukraine had been gradually closing all sky corridors of an altitude of 9,750 metres and less," Ukrainian deputy prime minister Gennadiy Zubko told reporters in Kiev.

The Dutch investigation said flight MH17 was flying at a cruising altitude of 10,100 metres.

"I can only say that all ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) recommendations were fulfilled," Zubko said.

Risk assessment

Joustra said the Dutch Safety Board also noted that the current system of responsibilities with respect to flying over conflict areas was inadequate.

Joustra said this was because operators assume that unrestricted airspace are safe.

"When assessing the risk, operators do usually take into account the safety of departure and arrival locations, but not the safety of the country they fly over.

"When flying over a conflict area, an additional risk assessment is necessary," he said.

He added that states involved in an armed conflict should receive more incentives and better support to safeguard the safety of their airspace.

"In addition, the Dutch Safety Board is of the opinion that operators should give public account for their flight routes," Joustra added. – AFP, October 13, 2015.

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