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Putin Calls For Ukraine Separatist Ceasefire After 'Tragedy'

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin talks to reporters during a meeting in Brasilia, Brazil.

President Vladimir Putin called on Friday for a ceasefire by pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian government forces fighting in eastern Ukraine to allow for negotiations.

Putin said he was in contact with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko after a Boeing 777 passenger airliner came down in an area under rebel control, killing all 298 people on board, many of them Dutch citizens.

"Direct talks between the opposing sides must be established as soon as possible. All sides in the conflict must swiftly halt fighting and begin peace negotiations," Putin said at a meeting with Russian Orthodox Church leaders at a monastery Sergiev Posad, near Moscow.

"It is with great concern and sadness that we are watching what is happening in eastern Ukraine. It's awful, it's a tragedy."

Putin, who has blamed the airliner tragedy on Poroshenko for refusing to extend a shaky

ceasefire with rebels in the region, said he hoped the Ukrainian president would be able to offer a peaceful way out of the conflict.

Kiev accuses pro-Russian separatists of shooting down the airliner with help from Russian intelligence representatives.

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