

OSCE Barred From Accessing Crash Site by 'Intoxicated' Gunmen

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A separatist holds a stuffed toy found at the crash site of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, near the settlement of Grabovo in the Donetsk region on Friday.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation said gunmen prevented monitors from accessing the site of a fatal Malaysian airliner crash in Ukraine.

Calling their behavior "impolite and unprofessional", an OSCE spokesman said Friday some gunmen in the area seemed intoxicated while others would not let the team of about 25 observers look at the wreckage of the Boeing 777.

"We had expected unfettered access, that's the way we work," Michael Bociurkiw told a news conference.

"Unfortunately the task was made very difficult. Upon arrival at the site ... we encountered armed personnel who acted in a very impolite and unprofessional manner. Some of them even

looked slightly intoxicated."

He denied that the observers had been fired at by rebels, but said one gunman fired shots into the air, seemingly to scare off some civilians.

Earlier, the OSCE's permanent council chairman, Thomas Greminger, said monitors had not been able to secure an access corridor for the crash-site and that investigators had stayed there for only about 75 minutes before setting off back to Donetsk.

Malaysian Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai said Saturday he believed Russia was doing its best to ensure a safe route to the site of the downed flight MH17.

"They are trying their level best to assist Malaysia to ensure we have a safe site," he told reporters.

Impartial Investigation

The U.S. said it was "very concerned" about the way the OSCE monitors had been treated.

"Those who say they are going to participate in or welcome this investigation need to give unfettered access and obviously, we didn't see that when these individuals were there for 75 minutes," U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told a regular news briefing in Washington.

The U.S. wanted to see "a credible, international investigation," she said, adding that the U.S. government had offered to send personnel and resources from the National Transportation and Safety Board and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Psaki said the Ukrainians had accepted the offer and the NTSB and FBI would each send at least one investigator, although it was unclear when they would go.

"And we of course will be responsive to their needs moving forward," she said.

World leaders have called for a rapid investigation into the shooting down of the airliner, which could mark a pivotal moment in deteriorating relations between Russia and the West. The U.S. and Britain said a surface-to-air missile appeared to have been fired from rebel held territory.

Fatal Crash

There were no survivors from the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, a Boeing 777. The United Nations said 80 of the 298 aboard were children. It was the deadliest attack on a commercial airliner and scattered bodies were seen over miles of rebel-held territory near the border with Russia.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power told a meeting of the UN Security Council on Friday it was unlikely the separatists could have effectively operated that missile system without help from knowledgeable personnel.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin called for an "impartial, open investigation of what

happened," and warned against any attempts to prejudge the matter.

Destroying Evidence

Bociurkiw said the OSCE intended to visit the site again on Saturday and spend the whole day there. "We unfortunately could not get much done today because of the behavior of the armed individuals and the lack of access," he said.

He said the team could not find anyone to talk to about the airliner's black box, and that it was not clear who was in charge of the territory where the airliner crashed.

"The crash site is a very large area and there may be more than one group who holds sway over that area," he said.

He added that while the bodies had not been touched — they seemed to be lying where they fell, personal possessions appeared to have been arranged in piles as if "for show."

Some of the bodies showed early signs of decomposition.

"As for observing close up the wreckage of the Boeing 777 that was very difficult. The armed guards did not allow us very much leeway to leave the roadway and look at the wreckage," he said.

Ukraine's government on Saturday accused pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine of trying to destroy evidence at the site where a Malaysian airliner crashed and of removing 38 bodies from the scene.

"The government of Ukraine officially states that the terrorists, with the help of Russia, are trying to destroy evidence of international crimes," the government said in a statement on Saturday.

"According to government data, the terrorists have taken 38 bodies to the morgue in (the eastern city of) Donetsk," it said, accusing specialists with "strong Russian accents" of threatening to carry out their own autopsies.

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