

Dutch PM Says Independent Probe Needed Into Downing of Flight MH17

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An Emergencies Ministry member loads items recovered at the site where the downed Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 crashed, near the village of Hrabove (Grabovo) in Donetsk region, eastern Ukraine, Oct. 13, 2014.

KUALA LUMPUR — Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Wednesday stressed the importance of a thorough, independent investigation of the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 before any decision on where those responsible should face trial.

The Dutch have the lead role in investigating the downing of the Boeing 777 aircraft, which crashed over rebel-held territory in eastern Ukraine in July with the loss of all 298 people aboard, two-thirds of them Dutch.

With the crash site too dangerous to access due to fighting, they have been relying mostly on publicly available information to carry out a remote investigation.

"What we now have to do is through the independent safety boards to exactly understand what happened and the public prosecutors have to work on the prosecution which follows

from this," Rutte said, when asked if the International Criminal Court was the right venue for any trial.

"Then it has to be decided at what court it should take place. As we see things now, it is not most likely that the International Criminal Court is most suited to this."

Rutte was on a one-day visit to Kuala Lumpur to meet his Malaysian counterpart, Najib Razak. Rutte flew from Amsterdam on Flight MH19, re-named from MH17 after the disaster.

Dutch authorities were able to reach the site of the crash for the first time in weeks on Oct 31, as the fighting between government forces and pro-Russian rebels took a pause, Rutte said earlier.

Kiev blames pro-Russian separatists for the airliner's destruction. Russia says a Ukrainian military aircraft shot it down.

A report by the Dutch safety board said in September that MH17 crashed after a "large number of high-energy objects" penetrated its fuselage.

Dutch authorities leading the investigation of the crash have been criticized by relatives of victims and lawmakers, who say not enough progress has been made.

Officials say cold weather and continuing hostilities are making progress slow.

Najib said Malaysia was expected to be a full member of the investigation team.

"Malaysia will be very professional," said Najib. "There is no reason to doubt that when Malaysia becomes a full member of the team ... then it will be very evident that we will play a very constructive role."

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