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UN Wants Black Sea Air Corridor to Be Controlled by Ukraine, Not Russia

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A delegate walks past a banner during a break at the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) global safety meeting in Montreal, Feb. 4, 2015.

The UN's aviation agency wants to open a new route for commercial aircraft in international airspace over the Black Sea that will be managed by Ukraine and without "interference" from Russia, the agency's secretary-general said.

Raymond Benjamin said the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is in talks to open new flight paths over parts of the Black Sea, closed to air traffic last year due to conflict in the region.

It was reported on Monday that Ukraine and Russia were in indirect talks on a deal that would allow air traffic to resume in international airspace over the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. That airspace, managed by Ukraine, is off the coast of the Crimea, which was forcibly annexed by Russia last year.

"What we would like now is to open a new route [air corridor]. We are in discussions with

Ukraine about this and the Ukraine has submitted a certain number of proposals to this effect that we are examining," Benjamin said in an interview on the sidelines of a global safety conference at ICAO headquarters.

Benjamin declined to identify the exact location of the new route.

Russia's ICAO delegation did not respond to requests for comment. Earlier on Wednesday, Russia's Interfax news agency said a Russian agency was controlling air traffic in that area, citing a source, and denied talks were ongoing.

The airspace, part of a well-traveled route for commercial airlines' long-haul flights to the Middle East and Asia, does not go over Crimea or eastern Ukraine where a Malaysian airliner was shot down last July.

"The problem is that Russia is interfering, and we don't want to have a plane which is getting two sets of instructions from different controls, but this, what I'm trying to do has nothing to do with it [Russia]," Benjamin said.

"As a United Nations agency, first, we consider [that] there has been a United Nations resolution that Crimea cannot be under the control of Russia. We don't recognize it."

A new route would enable Ukraine to take in air traffic fees that have fallen off steeply in the past year due to the ongoing conflict between pro-Russian separatists and western-supported Ukrainian government forces as airlines avoid the country's airspace.

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