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Putin Says Calls for UN Tribunal on Downing of Airliner Premature

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Local workers transport a piece of the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 wreckage at the site of the plane crash near the village of Hrabove (Grabovo) in Donetsk region, eastern Ukraine in this November 20, 2014 file photo.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday calls for a U.N. tribunal to be set up to prosecute suspects in the downing of a Malaysian airliner in a rebel-held part of Ukraine were counterproductive and premature.

Putin made his comments in a phone call with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte before Friday's first anniversary of the incident in which all 298 aboard were killed, many of them Dutch.

Rutte has said a U.N. tribunal would give "the best guarantee of cooperation from all countries" in seeking justice for the families of the victims. Russia disputes accusations that pro-Russian separatists fighting government forces in east Ukraine shot it down.

The Kremlin said in a statement that Putin "explained Russia's position regarding

the premature and counterproductive initiatives of several countries, including the Netherlands, on the establishment of an international tribunal."

It said he had underlined that any decisions and investigations must be thorough, objective and independent, and criticized what the statement described as politicised media coverage offering various versions of what happened.

Russia, which denies involvement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, has dismissed the theory widely supported abroad that the pro-Russian separatists hit the plane with a Russian-supplied BUK missile. Russian officials have suggested Ukrainian forces shot it down, a charge denied by Kiev.

The Netherlands is leading the criminal investigation, which is also assisted by Belgium, Australia and Ukraine. A final report on the cause of the crash is due to be released in October by the Dutch Safety Board.

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