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'Acquit Me,' Russian MH17 Suspect Tells Dutch Judges

By AFP

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Lawyers Boudewijn van Eijck (L) and Sabine ten Doesschate (R) attend criminal proceedings regarding the crash of flight MH17 at the Judicial Complex Schiphol in Badhoevedorp, Netherlands. **Robin van Lonkhuijsen / ANP / AFP**

A Russian suspect accused of downing Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 told Dutch judges on Friday he had "nothing to do with the disaster," as the long-running trial concluded.

Oleg Pulatov is one of four men on trial in absentia for shooting down the jetliner in July 2014 as it passed over war-torn eastern Ukraine, killing all 298 passengers on board.

The trial is being held in the Netherlands as the Boeing 777 was flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur and most of the victims were Dutch.

"I am not guilty. I have nothing to do with the disaster of July 17, 2014," Pulatov, said in a video statement played to the court.

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"I fully took part in the (court) procedure and there is irrefutable evidence that the prosecution did not explain the full circumstances of the crash," added Pulatov, speaking in Russian.

"It is the prosecution's main aim to get a conviction by any means," said Pulatov, dressed in a blue shirt and jacket and speaking directly to the camera.

"Acquit me," he then told judges at the hearing, which opened at a top-security courthouse near Schiphol airport in March 2020.

A verdict is not expected until at least Nov. 17, judges said on Friday.

Presiding judge Hendrik Steenhuis said, "the case has made a massive impression on all here in the courtroom and those outside."

Russian nationals Igor Girkin, Sergei Dubinsky and Pulatov as well as Ukrainian citizen Leonid Kharchenko have all refused to appear in court and are being tried in absentia.

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