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‘We Are Still Fighting for Justice’: MH17 Victims’ Families Solemn on 10th Anniversary of Tragedy

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The debris at the crash site of a passenger plane near the village of Grabove, Ukraine. **Dmitry Lovetsky / AP / TASS**

Piet Ploeg lost his brother Alex, his brother’s wife Edith and their son Robert while they were traveling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur in 2014.

They were among the passengers on Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 when it was shot down over war-torn eastern Ukraine on July 17, killing all 298 people on board.

The remains of Ploeg’s sister-in-law and his nephew were discovered at the crash site and sent back to the Netherlands for identification.

No trace of his brother was ever found.

International investigators revealed the plane was shot down by a Russian-made Buk surface-to-air missile over eastern Ukraine, where a conflict had ignited between Moscow-

backed separatists and Kyiv's forces. And in November 2022, a Dutch-led court convicted two Russians and a Ukrainian in absentia over the downing of MH17.

But 10 years since the tragedy, the relatives of those who lost their lives are still seeking answers.

"We are still fighting for justice," Ploeg, who is now the chairman of the MH17 Flight Disaster Foundation, told The Moscow Times.

"A lot of questions aren't answered yet: who fired the Buk missile? Why did they fire the missile? Who was in the end responsible? Who gave the order?"

"We'll keep on fighting until all the questions are answered."

Dutch prosecutors said last year that there were "strong indications" that Russian President Vladimir Putin personally approved the supply of the missile that shot the plane.

Russia has always denied any involvement and slammed the accusations that it played a role as politically motivated.

Dutch judges sentenced in 2022 two Russian nationals — Igor Girkin, who is a former commander of pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine, and Sergei Dubinsky — along with Ukrainian Leonid Kharchenko to life in prison in absentia for their roles in bringing down the jet.

Because the three men are in Russia, it is unlikely that they will serve this sentence.

Judges ruled that Girkin, Dubinsky and Kharchenko could all be held responsible for the transport of the Buk missile from a Russian military base in Russia and positioning it at the launch site, even if they did not pull the trigger.

There was not enough evidence to prove the involvement of Oleg Pulatov, the only suspect to have legal representation during the trial, the court ruled.

All the suspects were members of the Kremlin-backed armed group fighting Ukraine's government in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine, which was later annexed by Moscow in 2022.

One of the main questions that remains unanswered is who fired the missile.

Investigators halted their work on the MH17 crash in 2023, citing insufficient evidence to charge additional suspects.

However, the International Civil Aviation Organization, a United Nations agency, continues to investigate Russia's involvement.

The Netherlands and Ukraine have also filed a case against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, which is also reviewing individual complaints from the victims' families.

The European Union this week called on Moscow "to accept its responsibility in this tragedy

and to cooperate fully in serving justice" — yet over the years, the Kremlin stressed that it was Russia that "was not allowed to take part in the investigation."

For the victims' relatives, the investigation into the tragedy has become a long battle for truth.

"It has become a job," said Ploeg, who has been present at both the Dutch and ECHR court hearings and has traveled to Montreal to speak with International Civil Aviation Organization officials.

Ploeg said he decided from the beginning to fight for the interests of his brother Alex, who was a biologist, his wife Edith, who was an entrepreneur, and their son Robert, who was a student.

"We miss them very much, of course," Ploeg added.

AFP contributed reporting.

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