**Beat: Miscellaneous**

# UN says downing of Malaysian airliner `may amount to a war crime`

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**USPA News -** The suspected shootdown of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine earlier this month, which killed nearly 300 people, "may amount to a war crime," United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said Monday. Pillay, the UN`s top human rights official, demanded a "thorough, effective, independent and impartial investigation" by the government into the alleged violation of international law that occurred when the Malaysian passenger plane is believed to have been shot down over separatist-held eastern Ukraine, killing all 298 people on board in the world`s deadliest aviation disaster since September 11, 2001. The flight was likely downed by an SA-11 surface-to-air missile that was fired from separatist-controlled territory in eastern Ukraine, according to an assessment made public by the United States in the aftermath of the crash, placing blame on pro-Russian separatists.

Russia and separatists, for their part, have accused the Ukrainian government of being responsible. "This violation of international law, given the prevailing circumstances, may amount to a war crime," Pillay said on Monday, describing the crash as a "horrendous," though stopping short of placing blame on any side. The disaster on July 17 came just after the cut-off date of a United Nations report into the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The report released by the UN estimated that fighting in eastern Ukraine has claimed the lives of at least 1,129 people as of last Saturday, with 3,442 others injured and 10,000 more fleeing from areas hit by violence since April. Additionally, the report estimated the cost for the rebuilding and rejuvenation of the east to be at least 8 billion Ukrainian Hryvnia ($674.3 million). "I would like to stress to all those involved in the conflict, including foreign fighters, that every effort will be made to ensure that anyone committing serious violations of international law, including war crimes, will be brought to justice, no matter who they are," the High Commissioner said. "I urge all sides to bring to an end the rule of the gun and restore respect for the rule of law and human rights." The report documents how various armed groups in the east have disregarded the rule of law and continue to "abduct, detain, torture and execute" people held as prisoners. This has been done for the purpose of intimidation and "to exercise their power of the population in raw and brutal ways," it said. The Ukrainian government has responded to the violence through a recent increase in security operations in areas still controlled by separatists, resulting in "loss of life, property and infrastructure and causing thousands to flee." The report added that both sides are using extreme weaponry in built-up areas and that an alarming amount of heavy weaponry, including artillery, thanks, rockets and missiles, has been building up in Donetsk and Luhansk. Separatists have declared independence from Ukraine in both regions, but neither have received recognition from established countries, including Russia. "Both sides must take great care to prevent more civilians from being killed or injured," Pillay said. "Already increasing numbers of people are being killed with serious damage to civilian infrastructure, which - depending on circumstances - could amount to violations of international humanitarian law. The fighting must stop." In addition, the report notes the effects of the current economic recession in Ukraine and the "dire" situation in the east, which is the country`s mecca for heavy industry. Banks and other financial institutions have been closed, businesses have shut down, mines and infrastructures have been gravely damaged and public buildings have been seized. "With the economic life of Donetsk and Luhansk now crippled, the impact on the rest of the country will be severe," according to the report. The report urges the government "to ensure the full application of international human rights norms and apply adequate human rights guarantees, including avoiding reprisals, when identifying those suspected of violating the law while such areas were under control of the armed groups." Addressing the systematic problems facing the country "requires deep and badly needed reforms, especially as Ukraine seeks to fulfill its EU aspirations and establish a democratic and pluralistic society."

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