

Beat: Technology

Forensic experts identify another 26 victims of MH17 crash

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USPA News - Forensic experts in the Netherlands have this week identified another 26 victims of downed Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, pushing the total number of victims identified so far to 251, the Dutch government said Friday, more than two months after the crash. The Dutch Justice and Security Ministry said the remains of 26 additional victims had been identified since the previous update on September 19. It said 19 of the newly-identified victims were Dutch nationals while the other 7 had a foreign nationality.

Relatives of those victims have already been identified. In total, forensic experts have now identified 160 Dutch victims, including one Dutch national who also had a British passport, and 91 persons who had a foreign nationality. The nationalities of the foreign victims are not precisely known because the Dutch government previously decided to change its policy with regards to the publication of foreign victims being identified. "At the request of the embassies of the countries involved, the specific nationalities of victims who are not Dutch will not be released," the ministry said in a statement. "A team of experts is working hard to identify the victims but, as emphasized earlier, it can still take months before each victim has been identified. The media will be notified regularly about the status of this process." Malaysian Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai said one Malaysian victim was among those identified this week, raising the number of Malaysian nationals identified so far to 42. Neil Hulbert, a spokesman for Britain's Foreign Office, said earlier that 7 out of 10 British nationals had been positively identified by Thursday. The Australian government, for its part, declined to provide a figure but indicated that "substantial progress" has been made to identify Australian victims, though it noted that the process is slow, as was expected. Konrad Lax, a spokesman for Germany's Foreign Office, said the government could not comment on the identification process, but the Dutch government previously confirmed at least one German citizen had been identified. The remains of one victim from Canada and two from Belgium have also been identified. Friday's update came as disaster victim identification (DVI) specialists from New Zealand Police returned home after working at Korporaal van Oudheusden Barracks in Hilversum, the Netherlands, to assist in the identification of victims, matching known details of passengers with what could be forensically gathered from mortuary examinations. Inspector Mike Wright said the DVI team from New Zealand helped identify 183 victims from the crash, and said New Zealand immediately offered its assistance after the plane went down. "New Zealand Police was really on the front foot in demonstrating that they wanted to help," he said. Wright said DVI workers are motivated by a desire to help grieving families and determination to treat victims with the utmost respect and dignity. "Like all those I've worked with, I get a real sense of satisfaction from knowing I've been able to bring closure to families in particularly trying circumstances," he explained. Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 crashed near the city of Torez in eastern Ukraine on July 17, killing all 298 passengers and crew in the world's deadliest aviation disaster since the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. It is believed the aircraft was downed by a surface-to-air missile which was fired from separatist-controlled territory, but separatists there have denied being responsible. A preliminary report by the Dutch Safety Board said that puncture holes in the aircraft's wreckage suggested that small objects penetrated the aircraft in both the cockpit and forward sections. Holes were also found on the cockpit floor. Through analysis, the damage to the body of the aircraft is consistent with "high-energy objects" piercing the aircraft from the outside, they said. Forensic experts have so far been unable to recover all bodies from the site of the crash due to ongoing fighting in the area. A total of 228 coffins have been flown back to the Netherlands for identification, but some of the coffins contained only partial remains, and it is unclear how many bodies remain unaccounted for.

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