



Ladies and gentlemen, girls and boys, Dear relatives of the victims of flight MH17, fellow-sufferers, Here, at the Monument in Vijfhuizen or at home, via the livestream

How nice to be able to commemorate together again, how nice that you are here. Commemoration is important. The fact that you are all here, or following the commemoration via the livestream, confirms this. Here, by the monument and the trees, we are together, in the same grief. And that is possible here. We are here together again to remember our loved ones. From the first commemoration in November 2014, we now commemorate for the 9^e time...

17 July 2022, it is now eight years after the terrible and destructive attack on flight MH17, in which 298 innocent people died. Entire families have been lost. Children were orphaned, parents lost their children and sometimes also their grandchildren. Brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, grandmothers and grandfathers, uncles and aunts, cousins, friends, colleagues and neighbours suddenly fell away. Our lives were turned upside down in one fell swoop. Now we are next of kin...

And often we are confronted with this and our thoughts go back to the terrible moments in the afternoon and evening of 17 July 2014. More often than we would like.

But, how many of us want to try to get and keep our lives back on track, and fortunately many people are able to do that.

However, many of us would prefer not to be constantly reminded of our loved ones who have been violently lost, it is almost inevitable. The aftermath, or disaster after disaster, as it is sometimes said, seems to last an eternity.

We look back on an eventful year. In the meantime, 67 days of court sessions at the Schiphol Justice Complex have passed. 67 days of court hearings, which were confrontational and often difficult for next of kin.

67 days of sessions, always attended by relatives and followed by relatives abroad via livestreams.

The very poignant and very emotional statements of the 105 surviving relatives who exercised their right to speak in court often surface again. And in those days we experienced again how much suffering there was and still is among the many surviving relatives, but also how much courage and resilience. We have also been able to see how much dignity the bereaved have shown in the face of the disrespect and insensitivity of those responsible for the death of our loved ones. It has been noticed that survivors are strong. While you have every reason to be angry, you always respond with dignity and restraint, in newspapers, on television and also in court. I have great respect for that.



On the last day of the substantive hearing in court, many of us looked at each other. A bit blank and also emotional. What next? How to proceed?

We are now waiting for the court ruling in November or December this year. And that, too, will create tension and emotions. A lot of patience is being asked of us, and we have shown that we can muster it. There are still proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights and the International Air Transport Organisation, the ICAO. Procedures, which are part of the search for truth, justice and accountability, but which take a long time, a very long time, especially because of Russia's continuous sabotage. But one day justice will prevail!

As a Foundation, we will continue our efforts to represent your interests in all complicated procedures and keep the search for truth, justice and accountability on the agenda, also internationally.

But we also try to contribute to making the airspace safer, because what we, as surviving relatives, have had to endure is not something you want your worst enemy to have to endure.

The past year was also marked by sharply rising and escalating tensions between Russia and Ukraine. On 26 January this year, less than a month before Russia invaded Ukraine, Dutch and Ukrainian delegations faced off against the Russian delegation at the European Court of Human Rights. We were given the opportunity to share with the Court how great the impact of the attack on flight MH17 was on us as next of kin. A tense moment.

In the past period, we realised again and again that our loved ones were in fact the first non-Ukrainian victims of a cruel war, which actually started 8 years ago, albeit then in secret. And the many reports, also from the area where MH17 was shot down and where our loved ones lost their lives, brought the moment of 8 years ago very close to us again and again.

We are grateful for the great care taken by the Public Prosecutor's Office, the District Court and the great dedication of our lawyers when it comes to the interests of us as surviving relatives and the impact on us of the protracted court case. And we are also grateful for the unflagging support and involvement of our government and parliament and the ministries that are very much involved. Support in the search for justice and accountability, support in making resources available to be able to commemorate and support in all the complicated procedures.

We are now together at The Monument, which has once again been taken care of down to the last detail, partly thanks to the many volunteers from the Friends of the National Monument Foundation and the Recreation Board. We are very grateful to them. The trees are growing, we see pictures of the victims, the sunflowers are in bloom, wild flowers are



among them. We see the power and beauty of nature. But we also see and feel the strength in ourselves.

I am reminded of the statement by psychologist Mariken Spuij:

Mourning is like a rowing boat with two oars
One belt stands for the grief of loss
The other belt stands for further life
Both straps must be pulled in order to move forward
Otherwise you will keep on going round in circles".

Now we will commemorate! Here at the National Monument in Vijfhuizen, at home via the livestream, in the Netherlands and beyond. Together we stand strong and persevere.

Soon the names of our loved ones will be read out by relatives. 298 loved ones, 298 precious lives, which were abruptly and cruelly cut short. Mentioning the names is of utmost importance, because if your name is not mentioned, you will be forgotten. And that will never happen.

After the reading of the names, the Last Post will be sounded, followed by a minute's silence. Then we march past the memorial.

On behalf of the board of the Foundation, I wish you a good commemoration. Much strength, also in the coming period!