

MH17 anniversary: Tony Abbott vows to bring guilty to justice

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Melbourne: Prime Minister Tony Abbott today said Australia "owes it to the dead" to bring to justice those guilty of downing the Malaysia Airlines MH17 over eastern Ukraine last year, killing all 298 on board, as he led the memorial service to mark the first anniversary of the tragedy.

Speaking at the memorial in Canberra, held inside the Great Hall of Parliament House, Abbott said the deaths of the victims, that included 38 Australians, "leaves a void that can never be filled and a pain that still throbs". "In the worst of times, you have displayed the strength of giants and the grace of angels, and I am humbled by your example."

"Now we owe it to the dead to bring the guilty to justice. We owe it to the living to work for a more just and humane world, a world where people can turn their faces to the sun with the shadows behind them like the sun flowers blooming again in the fields where MH17 came down," he said.

At the ceremony attended by leaders, dignitaries and relatives and friends of all the 38 Australians who were killed, Abbott also unveiled a permanent memorial to the victims in a hedged garden outside the House of Representatives entrance to Parliament House.

"The plaque is set in soil that one of our police officers brought back from Ukraine. He knew that the place where MH17 came to rest was sacred and that a piece of it should come back to Australia."

"It was a humane and decent thing for him to know and do. It was a contrast to the savagery that brought down the plane," Abbott said as he and his wife laid a wreath at the base of the plaque.

Families of the victims, many in tears, followed, as they laid flowers alongside the wreath and kissed the bouquet and their fingers and pressed them against the plaque.

"They were innocent people living their lives to the full - advancing careers, celebrating birthdays, visiting family, enjoying retirement or taking the holiday of a lifetime."

"They deserved to be welcomed home, not shot out of the sky in a war of aggression by one country against a smaller neighbour," Abbott said about the tragedy in which the Boeing 777 is presumed to have been hit by a missile during heavy fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists.

All 298 passengers and crew, most of whom were Dutch, on board the ill-fated aircraft en route to Kuala Lumpur from Amsterdam were killed on July 17 last year.

Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Ukraine undertaking the joint criminal investigation have asked the UN Security Council to set up an international criminal tribunal to prosecute those responsible for downing the plane over conflict-ridden Ukraine.

Britain, one of the permanent members of the Security Council, backed the move today.

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