



Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/15947
1 September 1983

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 1 SEPTEMBER 1983 FROM THE ACTING PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE
PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On urgent instructions from my Government and in view of the gravity of the situation arising from the destruction by fighters of the Soviet air force of a Republic of Korea Boeing 747 aircraft carrying civilian passengers of different nationalities over waters of the Japanese island of Hokkaido, I wish to bring the following facts to your attention and to that of all members of the Security Council.

At 1400 hours, Greenwich Mean Time, 31 August 1983, a Korean Airline Boeing 747 en route from New York to Seoul, Korea, departed Anchorage, Alaska carrying 269 passengers and crew.

At approximately 1600 hours (GMT), the aircraft came to the attention of Soviet radar personnel. It was tracked constantly by Soviet military authorities from that time. According to information available to my Government, the aircraft strayed into Soviet airspace over the Kamchatka Peninsula, over the Sea of Okhotsk and over Sakhalin Island.

The Soviets tracked the commercial airliner for some two and one half hours. A Soviet pilot reported visual contact with the aircraft at 1812 hours. The Soviet plane was in constant contact with its ground control.

At 1812 hours the Korean aircraft was reported by the Soviet pilot at 10,000 metres. At 1826 hours the Soviet pilot reported that he fired a missile and the target was destroyed. At 1830 hours the Korean aircraft was reported by radar at an altitude of 5,000 metres. At 1838 hours the Korean plane disappeared from the radar screens.

The United States Government knows that at least eight Soviet fighters reacted at one time or another to the airliner. The pilot who shot the airliner down reported after the attack that he had, in fact, fired a missile, that he had destroyed the target, and that he was breaking away.

About an hour later, Soviet controllers ordered a number of their search aircraft to conduct search and rescue activity in the vicinity of the last position

of the Korean airliner reflected by Soviet tracking. One of these aircraft reported finding kerosene on the surface of the seas in that area.

The United States Government considers this action of Soviet military authorities against a civil air transport vehicle a flagrant and serious attack on the safety of international civil aviation.

This action by the Soviet Union violates the fundamental legal norms and standards of international civil aviation. These norms and standards do not permit such use of armed force against foreign civil aircraft. There exists no justification in international law for the destruction of an identifiable civil aircraft, an aircraft which was tracked on radar for two and one half hours, and which was in visual contact of Soviet military pilots prior to being deliberately shot down.

It is the considered position of the Government of the United States of America that this unprovoked resort to the use of force by the Soviet military authorities in contravention of international civil aviation organization standards and the basic norms of international law must be deplored and condemned by the international community and by world public opinion.

Upon instructions from my Government, I request, in association with the Republic of Korea, that you convene an urgent meeting of the Security Council to consider this serious matter. I further request that this letter be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed)

Charles M. LICHENSTEIN
Acting Permanent Representative
of the United States
