



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Senator Mack:

This is in response to your letter of June 15 to the Secretary, regarding compensation for the families of two American citizens who were killed in September 1995 when their hydrogen-filled balloon was shot down by the Belarusian Air Force.

The Department of State has held two substantive and productive rounds of discussions with the Government of Belarus concerning our claim for compensation arising out of the balloon shutdown. During these talks, the United States has presented a number of documents substantiating the calculation of damages and legal basis of the claim. The Government of Belarus has agreed that compensation is due in this matter.

However, the eviction of our Ambassador from his residence in Minsk last summer severely strained U.S.-Belarusian bilateral relations and suspended dialogue in most other areas. We have been working with the Belarusian government to resolve that dispute. Nevertheless, we soon plan to propose another round of talks on the balloon shutdown issue. When our Ambassador does return to Minsk, the United States will be in a better position to press on this and many other important issues.

We hope that you find this information useful. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Barbara Larkin  
Assistant Secretary  
Legislative Affairs

The Honorable  
Connie Mack,  
United States Senate.

CR