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Moscow Commemoration of Stalin's Victims Returns After Pandemic

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Several activists read out the names of at the Solovetsky Stone, a monument from the first Soviet labor camp. **Andrey Rushailo-Arno / october29.ru**

An annual commemoration of victims of Stalinist repressions has resumed live in person Friday after going online due to the coronavirus pandemic last year.

The Memorial human rights group organizes the "Returning the Names" ceremony, an annual gathering outside the former KGB headquarters in central Moscow that takes place every Oct. 29. Participants read the names, ages and professions of those who died in Stalin's purges in the 1930s.

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"Today we are returning the names and the memory of the places" where the victims had been repressed, said Memorial co-founder Yelena Zhemkova during a live stream of the event.

As many as 30 million are believed to have been killed during the repressions during the period known as the Great Terror.

Several activists who read out the names at the Solovetsky Stone, a monument from the first Soviet labor camp, also issued demands for the current Russian government to end what they called present-day repressions.

The Russian government declared Oct. 30 the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repressions.

But Memorial began to honor victims the day before, on Oct. 29, after activists balked at participating in official state ceremonies following what they called renewed repressions in the mid-2000s.

Russian authorities in 2013 labeled Memorial a "foreign agent" for receiving money from abroad. The government and pro-Kremlin vigilantes have increasingly targeted Memorial over its work.

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