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Worldwide Protests in Support of Ukraine

By AFP

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Protests erupted in London and other major cities around the world.

Pro-Ukraine demonstrations erupted across the world Saturday, as thousands took to the streets from London to New York to Tehran to denounce Russia's assault on its neighbor.

Moscow's invasion has a sparked global outcry and prompted punishing sanctions from the West, some directed against Russian President Vladimir Putin himself.

On Saturday, rallies were held in cities across the world to join the chorus of condemnation and urge an end to the bloodshed.

In Switzerland, thousands of people gathered across the country, including about 1,000 outside the United Nations' European headquarters in Geneva.

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Demonstrators draped in Ukraine's national colours of blue and yellow flocked to the "Broken Chair" — a large sculpture symbolising the civilian victims of war.

The protesters demanded tougher actions from the government, which has so far avoided imposing strict measures, choosing instead to stick closer to its traditional "neutral" stance.

Swiss-based Russians joined in to show their opposition to the war, holding signs saying "I am Russian."

More than 3,000 people gathered in the French city of Strasbourg, the seat of the Council of Europe human rights organisation, bearing placards calling Putin a killer and urging an end to the fighting.

"Putin and his entire clique will have to pay the price for this aggression and face an international court," said Borys Tarasyuk, Ukraine's permanent representative to the Council of Europe.

In France, there were protests in Paris, Montpellier and Marseille.

In Russia's neighbor Finland, thousands of people gathered in the capital Helsinki shouting "Russia out, down with Putin!"

Around 3,000 people gathered in Vienna, with homemade placards bearing slogans such as including "Stop the War" and speeches from Austria's Ukrainian community.

More than 1,000 demonstrators answered the call of trade unions and NGOs in central Rome, huddling around a podium bearing the words "Against War."

'Powerlessness'

Thousands of people had taken part in a torch-lit procession to the Colosseum, one of the Italian capital's major landmarks, on Friday evening.

Putin was the march's main target as banners caricatured him as an assassin with bloodstained hands and compared him to Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler with the words: "Can you recognise when history repeats itself?"

"We've always been close to the Ukrainian people," Maria Sergi, a 40-year-old Russian-born Italian, told AFP. "Our feeling of powerlessness is huge."

Around a thousand anti-war demonstrators turned out to protest in Barcelona on Saturday, said local police.

Dimitri, a Russian designer living in Barcelona, said he feared sanctions would set Russia's development back.

"We're all going to suffer," the 37-year-old told AFP.

In Britain, hundreds of protesters headed to Russia's embassy in London, with some defacing a street sign called "St. Petersburgh Place" opposite the embassy with fake blood.

And around 50 people in Tehran assembled by Kyiv's embassy to Iran, an AFP correspondent saw, some holding candles and Ukrainian flags and chanting against the war and Putin.

Protests were also reported in Israel, Estonia and New York on Saturday.

'Ukraine is bleeding'

In Georgia, almost 30,000 people hit the streets of Tbilisi on Friday night, waving Ukrainian and Georgian flags and singing both countries' national anthems.

Russia's attack on Ukraine resonates strongly in Georgia, a fellow ex-Soviet republic that suffered a devastating Russian invasion in 2008.

"We have sympathy for the Ukrainians, perhaps more than other countries, because we've experienced Russia's barbaric aggression on our soil," Niko Tvauri, a 32-year-old taxi driver, told AFP.

Teacher Meri Tordia added: "Ukraine is bleeding, the world watches and talks about sanctions that won't stop Putin."

More than 2,000 protesters gathered outside the Russian embassy in Greece's capital Athens on Friday evening following an appeal by the traditionally pro-Russian Communist and left-wing Syriza parties and more demonstrations followed Saturday.

'Anger'

The shockwaves from Moscow's invasion of its neighbour have reverberated beyond Europe.

In Argentina, Ukrainians and Argentines with Ukrainian ancestry were among the almost 2,000 people who descended on Russia's embassy in Buenos Aires on Friday.

They chanted "Glory to Ukraine, glory to its heroes" and the national anthems of Argentina and Ukraine.

Among the crowd was Tetiana Abramchenko, who moved to Argentina with her daughter in 2014 following Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.

"My overriding feeling is anger," the 40-year-old told AFP as she fought back tears. "The last thing I imagined was Russians coming to kill my people."

In Canada, dozens of demonstrators braved a snowstorm in Montreal to protest outside Russia's consulate on Friday afternoon.

"I am against this war. I hope this is the beginning of the end of this regime," said Russian Elena Lelievre, a 37-year-old engineer.

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