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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

G7 Denounces ‘War Crime’ as Russian Strike Kills Shoppers

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48th G7 Summit 2022 at Schloss Elmau from June 26-28, 2022. **picture alliance / SvenSimon / TASS**

A Russian missile strike on a crowded mall in central Ukraine killed at least 18 people in what Group of Seven leaders branded "a war crime" at a meeting in Germany where they looked to step up sanctions on Moscow.

The leaders vowed that Russian President Vladimir Putin and those responsible would be held to account for Monday's strike in the city of Kremenchuk, carried out during the shopping mall's busiest hours.

"Indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians constitute a war crime," they said in a statement condemning the "abominable attack."

Ukraine accused Russia of deliberately targeting civilians, with President Volodymyr Zelensky calling it "one of the most brazen terrorist acts in European history" in his evening broadcast

posted on Telegram.

"A peaceful town, an ordinary shopping center — women, children ordinary civilians inside," said Zelensky, who earlier shared a video of the mall engulfed in flames with dozens of rescuers and a fire truck outside.

Dmytro Lunin, governor of the Poltava region where Kremenchuk is located, said Tuesday that 18 people were killed in the attack. Fifty-nine were wounded, according to the emergency services.

In a separate attack Monday, Russian rockets killed at least eight civilians as they were out collecting water in the eastern city of Lysychansk, said Lugansk region governor Sergiy Gaiday.

Lysychansk has become the focus of heavy Russian attacks following the fall of its twin city, Severodonetsk.

"Our defenders are holding the line, but the Russians are turning the city into rubble... the infrastructure is completely destroyed," Gaiday said on Telegram.

After failing to capture Kyiv following their February invasion, Russian troops have focused their campaign on seizing a swathe of eastern Ukraine, and have been gaining ground.

A strike in Kharkiv, in Ukraine's northeast, killed four people and wounded 19 others, including four children, authorities said.

'Cruelty, barbarism'

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, speaking from the G7 gathering in the Bavarian Alps, said the Kremenchuk attack demonstrated Putin's "depths of cruelty and barbarism."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the world was "horrified", while UN chief Antonio Guterres's office condemned the strike as "totally deplorable."

French President Emmanuel Macron denounced the attack as an "abomination."

Diplomats said Ukraine requested a Tuesday meeting on the strikes at the UN Security Council, where Russia wields veto power but has not been able to prevent critical discussion of the invasion.

U.S. President Joe Biden and his peers from the wealthy G7 nations are seeking to tighten the economic screws on Moscow, even as soaring energy and food prices drive up global inflation.

"We will continue to provide financial, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support and stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes," the G7 said in a statement on the summit's second day.

Zelensky, addressing the leaders virtually, had urged them to "intensify sanctions" to help end the war before the bitter winter.

"We will continue to increase pressure on Putin," summit host German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in response. "This war has to come to an end."

G7 leaders are discussing a price cap on Russian oil imports and sanctions targeting Russia's defense sector.

But European officials fear difficulty in implementation.

To help bring down surging prices, France urged oil-producing nations to raise output in an "exceptional manner" and Macron backed a return to the market of crude from Iran and Venezuela, both under US sanctions.

On Sunday, the G7 announced plans to stop imports of Russian gold.

'Nowhere to hide'

The summit of the G7 — which comprises Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States — ends Tuesday and will be immediately followed by a NATO meeting in Spain.

Ukraine is again expected to dominate the agenda.

NATO said Monday it would boost its high-readiness force from 40,000 to 300,000 troops, in what chief Jens Stoltenberg called "the biggest overhaul of our collective defense and deterrence since the Cold War."

Moody's ratings agency confirmed that Russia defaulted on foreign debt for the first time in a century after bond holders did not receive $100 million in interest payments.

Russia has been hit by sweeping Western sanctions designed to choke off its access to the international financial system.

Moscow said Monday there were "no grounds to call this situation a default" as the payments did not reach creditors because of western sanctions, not a shortage of funds.

In the strategic eastern city of Sloviansk, a man's body still wearing one slipper lay in courtyard after a missile strike hit apartment blocks, according to AFP journalists.

The city is experiencing heavy strikes as the advancing Russians shell it from just a few kilometers away.

"How can I live? All the rooms are damaged, see?" said resident Tatiana Levchenko, surveying her row of cracked and blown-out windows on the ground floor and shrapnel-scored wallpaper.

"Where will I go, all of Ukraine is under fire! You see, there's nowhere to hide," added the 67-year-old.

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