

Russians Remember Stalin's Victims Amid Crackdown on Dissent

By [AFP](#)

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People lay flowers at the monument for the victims of political repressions in front of FSB (former KGB) headquarters in Moscow **Alexander Nemenov / AFP**

Russians commemorated the victims of Stalinist terror on Sunday, more than 20 months into Moscow's Ukraine offensive that has been accompanied at home by a major crackdown on dissent.

The Kremlin has doubled down on its version of history as troops fight in Ukraine, which often glosses over Stalinist crimes, with public commemoration of Soviet-era repression seen as unpatriotic.

Many Russians took part in the Returning the Names event organized by Nobel Prize winning Memorial — a rights and historical memory group shut down weeks before Moscow launched its 2022 military campaign.

Every year, the event sees people taking turns to read out the names of people executed during Stalin's Terror between 1936 and 1938.

In Moscow, it is traditionally held at the Solovetsky Stone memorial to victims, opposite the Lubyanka headquarters of the KGB, now occupied by its modern successor FSB.

But Memorial said ahead of the event that authorities banned it from holding the commemoration on the central Lubyanka Square.

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AFP reporters said the site was encircled by metal barriers, with police gathered there.

Oleg Orlov, Memorial's co-chair recently fined for denouncing the Ukraine campaign, still came to the stone to pay his respects.

Several Western ambassadors, including the U.S. envoy, laid flowers there.

Banned from gathering on Lubyanka, Memorial had instead organized the reading of the names at symbolic places associated with dissidents around the Russian capital.

This year's event comes as Memorial says there is a growing number of political prisoners in Russia.

Thousands of Russians have been detained, jailed or fined for opposing the conflict in Ukraine.

Reading of the names

Memorial displayed a live video feed of the event which was held in Russian cities and abroad on October 29 — when Russia marks Remembrance Day of the Victims of Political Repressions.

The reading of the names was held in Russian cities including Volgograd and Siberia's Novosibirsk, Tyumen and Irkutsk.

Events were also held in European cities, where many Russians who oppose the Kremlin's Ukraine offensive have fled to.

In Moscow, participants gathered to read the names outside the homes of late Soviet dissidents, at a symbolic prison and in cemeteries.

Orlov read out the names of victims at the Vvedenskoye Cemetery in northern Moscow, at the grave of one of Memorial's founders — Soviet dissident and historian Arseny Roginsky.

"It is not the first year that authorities ban the ceremony at the Solovetsky Stone," he said.

"But it is held in many place across Russia and not only," he added, before reading out the name of a victim.

"Dmitry Kuzmich Pragin. 34 years old. The director of the Nudolskaya textile factory. Shot on August 16, 1937, in Moscow."

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The aim of the event is to humanize and remember the hundreds of thousands of people who were executed under Stalin's Terror.

Participants are given pieces of paper with a name of a victim, with some also reading out a family member's name.

In Moscow, people read names outside the home of writer and Gulag survivor Varlam Shalamov and Soviet lawyer Sofiya Kalistratova, who had defended dissidents in the 1970s.

Participants also read out names outside Moscow's Butyrka Prison — one of the capital's largest remand prisons that dates back to the Soviet era.

"Ivan Petrovich Proseovich. 56 years old. Mechanic at a garage at the Kuybyshev factory. Shot on August 9, 1938 in Moscow," one woman read outside the red-brick prison, Memorial's live video showed.

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