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‘It Could Have Been Me’: Russians Mourn Victims of Deadly Concert Hall Attack

By Moscow Times Reporter

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A makeshift memorial outside Crocus City Hall. **Vyacheslav Prokofyev / TASS**

MOSCOW – Russians are mourning the victims of the attack on a popular live music venue in Moscow's suburbs that left at least 133 dead, including children, and injured dozens more.

People are laying flowers, toys and candles outside Crocus City Hall, the concert hall in the Moscow suburb of Krasnogorsk, in memory of the victims as well as donating blood for the wounded.

“I'm very sorry for the victims, it's all terrible,” Milena, who came to lay flowers on a rainy Saturday morning at Crocus City Hall, told The Moscow Times.

“It's terrible to realize that this was happening next to you. I was at home and imagined how this tragedy unfolded,” she said, crying.

“It was like a nightmare.”

Camouflaged attackers unleashed gunfire at Crocus City Hall on Friday evening, just before a concert by veteran rock band Piknik, and reportedly set off a grenade or incendiary device.

Footage showed concertgoers being shot at point-blank and the building engulfed in flames. According to investigators, people died both from gunshot wounds and from smoke inhalation after the fire engulfed the 6,000-seat venue.

The attack, which was claimed by the Islamic State jihadist group, is the second-deadliest in Russia's modern history following the Beslan school siege of 2004, according to official estimates.

On Saturday morning, Crocus City Hall was heavily cordoned off by police, who did not allow people to approach the building, while emergency services continued to search for victims and clean up debris.

Rescue workers were still working at the attack site on Saturday and pulling bodies from the building. The official death toll, which continued to rise throughout the day, stood at 133 as of 8:00 p.m. Moscow time.

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Some people near Crocus City Hall were crying.

"I'm also a fan of the band and I know what kind of people listen to this band. I feel like I have lost my friends," Ksenia, who came to lay a bouquet of red roses at the site of the attack, told The Moscow Times.

"It could have been me," Ksenia said, crying.

Raisa, a pensioner in her 80s who lives near the concert venue, also came on Saturday morning because she "couldn't help but pay tribute."

"My heart told me to go. I got up this morning and saw the news. I couldn't donate blood [because of my age] so I came here," Raisa told The Moscow Times.

"Children were killed. This is very painful."

On Saturday, memorial posters displaying a single candle and the message "We mourn" replaced some advertising billboards across Moscow.

Sunday was declared an official day of mourning with major events canceled across the country.

Long lines of people wishing to donate blood to the injured formed at several Moscow hospitals.

"We are one people, and we need to support each other during such challenging times," said Alexei, who waited in line for three hours near the blood donation center on Shabolovka Ulitsa.

It took around 19 hours for President Vladimir Putin to address the nation regarding the attack.

“Terrorists, murderers, non-humans will face the unenviable fate of retribution and oblivion,” Putin, who won re-election this week, said in a televised address.

"The criminals cold-bloodedly and purposefully went precisely to kill, to shoot our citizens at point-blank range. Our children.”

“Just like the Nazis once carried out massacres in the occupied territories, they planned to stage a show execution," he said, referring to Ukraine, which is fighting a two-year war against invading Russian forces.

Putin did not address the Islamic State's claim of responsibility for the attack.

Russia said 11 people, including the four assailants, had been arrested.

The country’s FSB security service said some of the perpetrators had fled towards the Russia-Ukraine border, adding that the assailants had "appropriate contacts" in the country.

The attack reminded many Russians of shootings and bombings that have occurred across the country in recent decades, especially the 2002 Dubrovka Theater siege in Moscow, when Chechen rebels took more than 800 hostages. The security services flooded the theater with sleeping gas, killing 132 of the hostages.

Related article: Russian State Media Release Interrogation Videos of Concert Attack Suspects

Following Friday’s attack, Moscow, the Moscow region and the rest of Russia’s regions imposed additional anti-terrorism and anti-sabotage measures.

Eyewitnesses to the attack and people who live near Crocus City Hall questioned the security measures and evacuation routes in place at the building.

Photographer Dave Primov, who was at the venue Friday night, published videos showing how he and other people encountered locked doors as they searched for a way out of the building. They eventually had to break one open to escape.

"It's a big question for security — how they let them [the attackers] through and how they entered the hall so calmly. Why was this happening?" Anna, who lives near Crocus City Hall, told The Moscow Times.

Another witness said she had not noticed police or emergency services while escaping the building.

“I was almost crushed in the coat check door (only one door was open). We ran for more than half an hour...During this time, we did not see or hear any [official] services. By and large, we got out on our own,” Marina Trushkina, who was inside the building, said on the VKontakte social media website.

“Today is my second birthday. I am alive,” Trushkina said.

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