Russian Missile Barrage on Ukraine City Kills 18

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State Emergency Service of Ukraine

Rescuers were removing mountains of rubble on Thursday from the site of a lethal Russian missile strike on Ukraine's historic city of Chernihiv, where at least 18 people were killed in an attack that has prompted fresh pleas for allies to boost Kyiv's overstretched air defense systems.

Three Russian missiles crashed into the northern Ukrainian city on Wednesday, leaving pools of blood on the street at the scene of one strike, where rescue workers searched for survivors and carried away the wounded on stretchers.

The official death toll rose to 18 as of Thursday morning, with 77 people — including four children — injured, according to Ukraine's emergency services department.

As President Volodymyr Zelensky appealed for more help from Western allies, the U.S. House

of Representatives finally announced a vote on a massive military aid package that includes about $61 billion in long-delayed support for Kyiv, a move welcomed by President Joe Biden.

Embed:

Chernihiv resident Olga Samoilenko told AFP she and her children found shelter in the corridor of their apartment building after the first missile exploded.

"Our neighbors were already there. We started shouting for everyone to fall to the floor. They did. There were two more explosions. Then we ran to the parking lot," the 33-year-old said.

Zelensky questions West's resolve

Mayor Oleksandr Lomako said more than a dozen buildings had been damaged in the attack, while other officials said dozens of vehicles and medical and educational facilities were also damaged.

A 25-year-old policewoman on sick leave was among those killed after suffering a severe shrapnel injury, the interior minister announced.

AFP journalists at the scene saw a body being pulled from the rubble and an eight-story hotel building gutted by the strike where municipal workers were using a crane to clear debris.

Nearby apartments, a beauty salon and a beer shop were among structures whose windows were blown out by the attack.

The Chernihiv region, which borders Belarus to the north, was partially occupied at the beginning of the Russian invasion but has been spared fighting for around two years since Russian forces retreated.

Zelensky blamed Russia for the attack but also said the West should do more to help defend Ukraine's skies.

"This would not have happened if Ukraine had received sufficient air defense equipment and if the world's determination to resist Russian terror had been sufficient," he said.

'Same level of defense'

Addressing the European Council by video link later Wednesday, Zelensky said Ukraine should enjoy the same cover from aerial attacks as Israel and pleaded for more air defense systems.

"Here in Ukraine, in our part of Europe, unfortunately, we don't have the level of defense that we saw recently in the Middle East," Zelensky said.

Zelensky was referring to the interception of Iran's drone and missile barrage on Israel last Saturday.

"Our Ukrainian sky, the sky of our neighbors deserves the same level of defense."

The Ukrainian president added: "All lives are equally valuable."

In Washington, Biden applauded the planned vote in Congress on the massive new Ukraine aid package, scheduled for Saturday after months of political wrangling, and called on American lawmakers to pass it.

"I will sign this into law immediately to send a message to the world: 'We stand with our friends, and we won't let Iran or Russia succeed'," he said in a White House statement.

Chernihiv lies around 145 kilometers north of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and had a pre–war population of around 285,000 people.

The city was badly damaged when Russian tanks swept into Ukraine from Belarusian territory in February 2022 and besieged the city until April of that year.