

Beslan Remembers Victims of Russia's Deadliest Terror Attack 20 Years On

By [Moscow Times Reporter](#)

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A memorial event at the in Beslan school gym to mark 20 years since the hostage crisis. **Sergei Karpukhin / TASS**

Relatives of the victims of the Beslan school siege gathered Sunday to pay tribute at the ruins of the school, remembering the 330 people, including 186 children, who lost their lives in Russia's deadliest terror attack.

School bells [rang](#) at 9:15 a.m. local time, marking the start of the siege 20 years ago, while mourners laid flowers, lit candles, and placed bottles of water — a tribute to the hostages who were held in inhumane conditions.

On Sept. 1, 2004, militants from Chechnya stormed Beslan School No. 1 in North Ossetia, demanding the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya. Gunmen took 1,100 hostages, including children, parents and teachers who had come to the school to celebrate the start of the new academic year.

For nearly 52 hours, the hostages were held without food or water. Negotiations with the militants were tense and largely unproductive, with the attackers refusing to back down from their demands.

On the third day of the hostage crisis, a series of explosions erupted inside the school, plunging the situation into chaos and triggering an assault by Russian special forces. It remains unknown whether the explosions were accidental detonations or triggered by the militants, who had rigged the school with bombs.

Related article: [In Photos: 20 Years After the Beslan School Siege](#)

The Beslan tragedy — including the storming of the school by security forces — sparked widespread outrage and grief, as well as sharp criticism of the Russian authorities.

In 2017, in response to a joint complaint filed by 89 families of Beslan victims, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that the Russian government did not act on evidence of a likely attack and used “indiscriminate force” that contributed to the casualties among the hostages and made other failures to protect the lives of Russian citizens.

The ECHR decision, which looked at evidence and testimonies collected by an independent investigation, also said Russian authorities had information about the planned attack and failed not only to prevent it but to heighten security or warn the public.

“Unfortunately, not a single point from the decision of the European court is being followed, and this is very sad,” Susanna Dudyeva, who heads the Mothers of Beslan group, said Sunday during a roundtable discussion about the tragedy.

“We return again and again to September 1–3, 2004, because there are still blanks, there are still questions... we are worried that not everything has been done because there is no objective investigation,” she said. “We are afraid that this can repeat itself.”

“We will once again appeal to the investigative agencies for a new launch of the probe into the Beslan attack,” Dudyeva added.

President Vladimir Putin, who has been [criticized](#) by the victims’ relatives over the past 20 years, [visited](#) Beslan for the first time in a decade on Aug. 20. He was seen laying flowers, kneeling and crossing himself at the City of Angels memorial cemetery in honor of the victims.

According to the state-run TASS news agency, he also [visited](#) the school for the first time since the massacre.

Related article: [Putin Visits Beslan Ahead of School Siege's 20th Anniversary](#)

Speaking with mothers of victims in Beslan, Putin likened the fight against terrorism in the early 2000s to Russia’s present-day invasion of Ukraine.

“Russia defeated terrorists in the Caucasus, and it will defeat neo-Nazis committing crimes in

the Donbas and Kursk region,” he said, referring to the ongoing cross-border incursion in southwestern Russia.

During the meeting with Putin, the Mothers of Beslan group expressed frustration that the investigation into the school siege has still not been completed, Aneta Gadiyeva, co-chair of the group, told the independent outlet Agentstvo.

Unlike Putin’s comments on Ukraine, that part of the meeting was not broadcast on state television.

According to Gadiyeva, Putin responded by saying he was unaware of the investigation’s status and would ask the head of the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, to get involved.

An open letter published Sunday by Ella Kesayeva, who lost several relatives in the siege and has been an outspoken critic of the official investigator, called on five Russian generals involved in the Beslan operation to answer the many allegations.

“You are above the law, as if there was no Beslan, and for 15 years you are living in peace and respect,” the letter said. “Tell us who ordered you to use deadly weapons on the school.”

AFP contributed reporting.

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