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‘Soviet Genocide’ Museum to Replace Shuttered Gulag History Museum in Moscow

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The Gulag History Museum. **Yuri Smityuk / TASS**

A museum dedicated to the “genocide of the Soviet people” and Nazi war crimes will replace Moscow’s award-winning Gulag History Museum more than a year after its abrupt closure over alleged safety violations.

A short statement posted on the Gulag History Museum’s website said that the new Museum of Memory “will cover all stages of Nazi war crimes during the Great Patriotic War,” referring to the Eastern Front of World War II.

Around 27 million soviet citizens were estimated to have died during the conflict.

Russian news agencies, citing Moscow’s Department of Culture, reported that Natalia Kalashnikova, director of the Smolensk Fortress museum, will also head the Museum of Memory, slated to open later this year.

In November 2024, Moscow authorities said the Gulag History Museum was temporarily closed due to "fire safety violations." The museum's long-time director was replaced just a few months later.

High-ranking Kremlin officials and the FSB security service were behind the decision to close the museum, a Moscow government official previously told The Moscow Times, saying that multiple inspections had not detected any fire safety violations.

Related article: Kremlin and FSB Order Gulag Museum's Closure in Latest Crackdown on Historical Memory

First established in 2001, the Gulag History Museum told visitors the story of the Soviet Union's vast network of forced labor camps, as well as their legacy in modern Russia, with artifacts gathered from all over the country.

Its closure came as Russian authorities have worked to downplay Soviet-era repressions in recent years, an effort that has intensified since the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

President Vladimir Putin has regularly evoked World War II history in justifying the invasion, claiming it was needed to "denazify" Ukraine and stop "genocide" against the Russian-speaking population of partially occupied eastern Ukraine. Kyiv and its Western allies have dismissed those arguments.

Museum of Memory director Kalashnikova defined the new institution's mission as "cultivating a strong rejection of Nazism in all its forms in the current generation."

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