

Beat: Arts

Russia marks 9th anniversary of Beslan school massacre

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USPA News - Memorial services were held across the Russian Republic of North Ossetia-Alania on Tuesday to honor the hundreds of people who died nine years ago when Russian security forces stormed a school in Beslan where more than 1,100 people were being held hostage. Thousands of people gathered at School Number One from Sunday through Tuesday to pay a quiet tribute to the victims, many of them who were young children.

It began with a moment of silence at 9:15 a.m. local time on Sunday, the moment exactly nine years earlier when dozens of gunmen stormed the school. Relatives of the victims laid flowers at the site of the destroyed school, and candles continued to burn on the ruins until 1:05 p.m. local time on Tuesday, which marks the time when the hostage crisis entered its final chapter. Residents also continued the tradition of bringing bottled water and toys to the memorial site, where funeral music was played at the school's gym. North Ossetia-Alania President Taymuraz Mamsurov, whose children were among the hostages, was among those attending the memorial services. Many other government officials also attended, although the annual memorials are always quiet and fairly small at the request of the families. Numerous religious services were held in the school yard and across the republic during the three-day memorial. People also gathered outside the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in downtown Moscow, the capital of Russia, to honor the hundreds who died in the attack. The hostage crisis began on September 1, 2004, when Ingush and Chechen Islamic militants took more than 1,100 people hostage at the school, demanding independence for the Russian republic of Chechnya. The attack began on the first day of school, just after school bells stopped ringing, and continued until the afternoon of September 3 when Russian security forces stormed the building. The hostage crisis resulted in the deaths of 334 people, more than half of them children, while hundreds more were injured, including some who have been left disabled for life. It marked the deadliest terrorist attack ever committed in Russia, and September 3 is now known as a "Day of Solidarity in the Fight Against Terrorism."

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