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3 days in hell: Russia mourns Beslan school siege victims 10 years on

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A volunteer carries a small child after special forces stormed a school seized by heavily armed masked men and women in the town of Beslan in the province of North Ossetia near Chechnya, September 1, 2004. (Reuters)

4.8K

719

36

September 1 marks 10 years since one of the most horrifying terrorist attacks in Russia, the Beslan school siege which saw over 300 people, 186 of them children, killed. Events to commemorate the massacre are taking place across the country.

Tags

Anniversary, Children, Russia, Terrorism, Violence

The site of the tragedy, former school #1 in Beslan, a small town in Russia's North Ossetia, will become the center of the remembrance ceremonies which have been annually held since 2005.

READ MORE: 'I don't feel guilty': Single surviving Beslan terrorist unrepentant 10 years after tragedy

READ MORE: The City of Angels - 10 years after Beslan

In what has now become a tradition, the three-day events to commemorate those killed in the attack, will start at the schoolyard with a bell ring. Such bells ring in all Russian schools on September 1, symbolizing the beginning of a school year. For survivors of the Beslan massacre and relatives of the victims it is the bell toll that divided their lives 'before' and 'after'.



A cemetery in Beslan, North Ossetia--the last abode of victims of the September 2004 appalling terrorist act at secondary school No. 1 (RIA Novosti/Kazbek Basaev)

Hundreds of people, including public activists and top officials, are expected to come to the site to pay their tributes to the hostages and those who lost their lives in the tragedy. They will lay more flowers and light candles at the walls of the ruined school building and a recently opened monument: a 50-meter long granite memorial with the names of all the victims carved on it. Toys and bottles with water will be brought in: the captives were held in the cramped, stuffy school gym and suffered from unbearable heat and thirst.

On September 2, a requiem concert will be held on the stage of Beslan's culture center. On Wednesday, at a ceremony in the schoolyard, students will release into the air 334 white balloons - the number of people who died in the hostage crisis. Later in the day, the commemorating ceremonies will move to the town's cemetery – called The City of Angels – where hundreds of the victims were laid to rest.

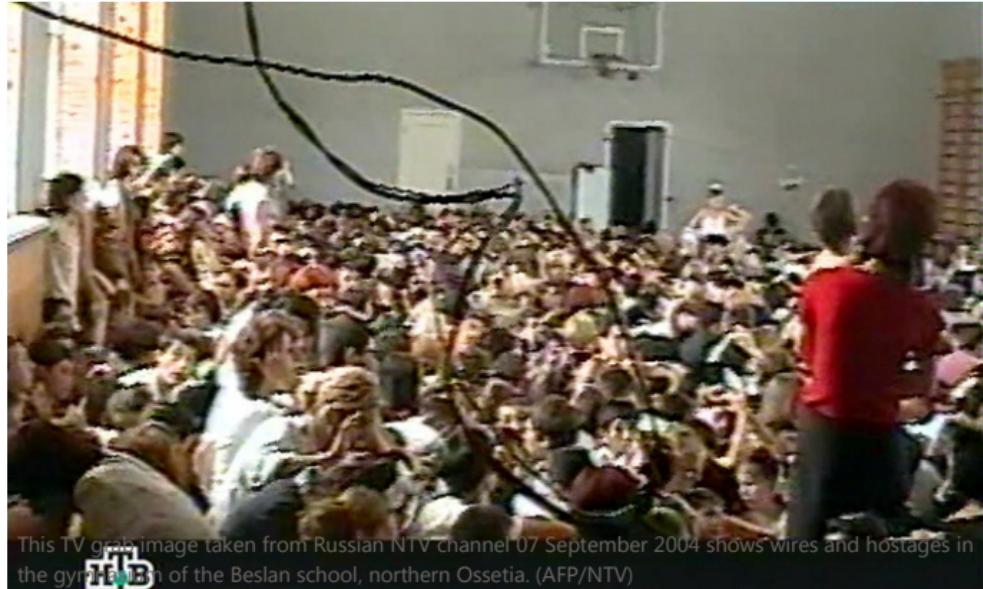
The bloodiest terrorist attack in Russia's history claimed - in official figures – the lives of 186 children, 118 relatives or school guests, 17 teachers, 10 special forces officers, 2 Emergencies Ministry employees and one policeman. A further 810 people were injured.

RT looks back at 2004 Beslan hostage crisis

Wednesday, September 1, 2004

The Day of Knowledge, the beginning of a school year. A long-awaited event for first-graders: dressed nicely, with their brand-new school kits they rushed to Beslan's school #1 for their First Bell ceremony. Many pupils were accompanied by relatives and younger siblings. A noisy crowd of people – including 859 students and 59 teachers - gathered in front of the school building for festivities.

Shortly after 09:00 am local time 32 heavily-armed gunmen on two vehicles broke into the school and opened fire. Several civilians were killed in the shootout between the attackers and local police who ran to the scene after first gunshots were heard.



This TV grab image taken from Russian NTV channel 07 September 2004 shows wires and hostages in the gymnasium of the Beslan school, northern Ossetia. (AFP/NTV)

The terrorists ordered the people to get inside the school building. Between 50 to 100 people – primarily high-graders and adults – managed to run away, but about 1,100 hostages were forced into the sports hall.



This TV grab image taken from Russian NTV channel 07 September 2004 shows a gunman connecting wires as hostages sit in the gymnasium of the Beslan school, northern Ossetia. (AFP/NTV)

The gunmen barricaded doors and windows in the gym and started mining the building with explosive devices. Russian media reported that there were two women wearing suicide-bomb belts among the attackers.



This TV grab image taken from Russian NTV channel 07 September 2004 shows a gunman walking as hostages walk the gymnasium of the Beslan school, northern Ossetia. (AFP/NTV)

At around 10am one hostage, an adult man Ruslan Betrozov, was reportedly shot dead in the gym, right in front of the children, after trying to talk to the terrorists and calm down the captives.



Broken windows are seen at the central school building seized by heavily armed masked men and women in the town of Beslan, some 50 km east of North Ossetia. Broken windows are seen at the rear of a school building seized by heavily armed masked men and women in the town of Beslan in the province of North Ossetia near Chechnya, 07 September 2004. (Reuters)

By 11am the school territory was surrounded by police forces and residents of nearby buildings were evacuated. Senior public officials arrived at the site. Two authorities suggested exchanging themselves for captured children, but the terrorists turned down the proposal. President Vladimir Putin canceled his summer vacation in Sochi and returned to Moscow.



Hundreds of Ossetian inhabitants, relatives of hostages wait outside the school, where a group of gunmen, wearing bags laden with explosives, are holding hostage some 350 people in the northern Ossetian town of Beslan, some 50 km east of Vladikavkaz, 02 September 2004. (AP Photo/Maxim Marmur)

The attackers, filming everything that was happening inside the school, announced they would only talk to the president of North Ossetia, president of the neighboring Republic of Ingushetia or Vladimir Rushailo, who was Russia's Interior Minister in 1999-2001. The latter was however confused with Professor Leonid Roshal, a famous Russian pediatrician, by the hostage who was taking down the note. The terrorists demanded the withdrawal of armed forces from Chechnya (a Russian republic in the North Caucasus) and the release of a group of arrested gunmen.



Russian soldiers take position outside the school, where a group of gunmen, wearing belts laden with explosives, are holding hostage some 350 people in the northern Ossetian town of Beslan, some 30 kms outside Vladikavkaz, 02 September 2004. (AFP/ITAR-TASS)

The hostage-takers threatened to blow up the school in case police attempted to storm the building. They put children in the windows using them as human shields and said they would kill 50 hostages for every killed member of their group and 20 – for every wounded one.

At 3:50pm the Russian Air Force delivered the first groups of Special Forces troops.

Between 4 and 4:30pm, a blast and shooting were reported in the seized school. Several hostages died and their bodies were thrown out of the windows shortly later.



A Russian special forces soldier aims his weapon from a position outside the school, where a group of gunmen, wearing belts laden with explosives, are holding hostage some 350 people in the northern Ossetian town of Beslan, some 30 kms outside Vladikavkaz, 02 September 2004. (AFP/ITAR-TASS)

Dr. Roshal, though unwanted by the gunmen, still managed to establish contact with them at around 8pm. They insisted that the presidents of Ingushetia and North Ossetia, along with Putin's advisor Aslambek Aslakhanov, must participate in the talks as well.

By 9pm a large crowd of people – mainly the hostages' relatives – had gathered outside the school building. The gunmen refused to accept medicine, water and food for the hostages.



Relatives of school children being held hostage wait for further developments as they sit near the seized school in the town of Beslan, province of North Ossetia near Chechnya, September 1, 2004. (Reuters)

Thursday, September 2, 2004

Negotiations between Roshal and the attackers continued late into the night, but brought no breakthrough.

In the morning, the head of oil refining company RussNeft, Mikhail Gutseriev, offered terrorists money in exchange for hostages. They declined the proposal.



An Ossetian militiaman aims his rifle through a window frame in a classroom, at the opposite school, where a group of

gunmen, wearing belts laden with explosives, are holding hostage some 350 people in the northern Ossetian town of Beslan, some 30 km's outside Vladikavkaz, 02 September 2004. (AFP/ITAR-TASS)

At 2pm President Putin made his first official statement on the situation: "Our main task is, of course, to save the lives and health of the hostages. All actions of our forces dealing with the hostage release will be focused on that exclusive task."

As a result of negotiations, by 4pm the gunmen agreed to meet with former Ingush President Ruslan Aushev. After the talks, 26 hostages – women with babies – were released. The gunmen also handed a message to Aushev with their demands: the withdrawal of troops from Chechnya and full sovereignty to the republic.



Russian police officer carries a released baby from the school seized by heavily armed masked men and women in the town of Beslan. (Reuters/Viktor Korotayev)

Meanwhile, Roshal continued negotiations with the attackers, asking them to allow food and water be passed to the captives, but the talks yielded no positive results.



A Russian soldier waits on his position as a car burns outside the school where a group of gunmen, wearing belts laden with explosives, are holding civilian hostages in a school in the northern Ossetian town of Beslan, some 30 km's outside Vladikavkaz, 02 September 2004. (AFP Photo/Maxim Marmur)

Friday, September 3, 2004

Several blasts rocked the school and shooting was reported during the night and early in the morning.

Those released said that the number of hostages inside the building was over 1,000 instead of 354 as it had initially been thought.



Volunteers carry an injured civilian to safety after soldiers stormed a school seized by heavily armed masked men and women in the northern Ossetian town of North Ossetia, near Chechnya, September 3, 2004. (Reuters)

Shortly after the noon, the terrorists allowed Emergencies Ministry workers to approach school to retrieve the bodies of those killed that had been lying in front of the building for two days.





Russian special forces soldiers jump from armoured vehicle during the rescue operation in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia, 03 September 2004. (AFP Photo/Alain Mamur)

At around 1pm, as rescuers got to the site, two powerful explosions ripped through the school gym followed by gunfire. It was not immediately clear what caused the blasts, but later reports suggested that the gunmen provoked them accidentally. According to one version, a suicide bomber blew herself up. According to another, explosive devices placed into hoops in the gym fell down.



Ossetian volunteers carry a stretcher with injured boy from the school garden during the attack operation in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia, 03 September 2004. (AFP Photo/Yuri Tutov)

The blasts triggered chaos, with hostages trying to flee through a hole in the wall and terrorists opening fire on them. Security forces returned fire and helped a dozen captives run away, often sheltering them with their own bodies.



A Russian special forces soldier carries an injured woman during the rescue operation of Beslan's school, northern Ossetia, 03 September 2004. (AFP Photo/Yuri Tutov)

The gunmen attempted to force the remaining hostages from the partly ruined sports hall to the canteen.





This TV grab image shows Russian soldiers helping an injured woman during the rescue operation in Beslan, North Ossetia 03 September 2004. (AFP/NTV)

At 1:10pm security forces started storming the building. Snipers opened fire on terrorists' firing points while troops were evacuating the hostages. Federal Security Forces (FSB) officers broke into the gym: there were dozens of wounded and exhausted hostages there, but the terrorists had moved to the school canteen and were shooting from there.



Russian special forces soldiers run during the rescue operation of Beslan's school, northern Ossetia 03 September 2004. (AFP Photo/Vin Tutov)

At about 2.20pm a blaze broke out in the sports hall. By the time fire brigades arrived at the scene, the majority of hostages from the gym had been evacuated. About a hundred special forces troops were inside the building. Five militants were reportedly killed.



СЕВЕРНАЯ ОСЕТИЯ. ЗАЛОЖНИКИ

This TV grab image taken from Russian NTV channel shows hostages in the school garden during rescue operation in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia 03 September 2004. (AFP/NTV)

After 3pm evacuation from other parts of the school was still ongoing amid a continuing gunfight. Mobile medical units were deployed in the area to immediately help the wounded before taking them to hospitals in Beslan and Vladikavkaz.



TV grab image taken from Russian channel NTV shows hostages in the school garden during the rescue operation 03 September 2004 in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia. (AFP/NTV)

Between 6 and 7pm, after it was established that there were no more captives in the school building, troops used Shmel rocket infantry flamethrowers against the militants. Two T-72 tanks were also deployed in the nearby area. By 9:30pm the hostage-takers were proclaimed eliminated and shortly before midnight the school was under full control of security forces.



A Russian special police soldier (l) carries an injured colleague as two soldiers and two women cover behind the APC during the rescue operation of Beslan's school, northern Ossetia, 03 September 2004. (AFP Photo/Valery Matyukov)

Saturday, September 4, 2004

Rescuers continued recovering the bodies of the victims from the school debris.

Relatives who had not found their loved ones alive flocked to hospitals and examined the long lists of injured placed on the walls, hoping to find names among them.



Relatives of the school attack victims check the lists of injured at a hospital in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia, 04 September 2004, after Russian security forces gained control of the school where up to 1,000 children and adults had been held hostage by armed rebels. (AFP Photo)

Those who lost hope had to look among the dead bodies.



People search for relatives among the bodies of dead hostages at a morgue in the town of Vladikavkaz, September 4, 2004. (Reuters/Sergei Karpovskiy)

President Putin arrived in Beslan in the early hours on Saturday and visited one of hospitals.





Woman reacts after finding her relatives among the dead bodies of Beslan hostage crisis in the yard of the morgue in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia, 05 September 2004. (AFP Photo)

Sunday, September 5, 2004

The official death toll rose as some of the badly injured died. Over 50 remained in critical condition.

The first funerals took place.



Fatima Tetova, mother of killed hostages Irina,13 and Alina,12, crying during their funeral in the town of Beslan in the province of North Ossetia near Chechnya, September 5, 2004. (Reuters)

North Ossetian Interior Minister, Major General Kazbek Dzantiyev, announced his resignation. He said that "as an officer and a man" he had "no right" to occupy his post after what happened in Beslan.



Relatives and neighbours of killed sisters hostages Irina,13 and Alina,12 Tetova cry during their funeral in the town of Beslan in the province of North Ossetia near Chechnya, September 5, 2004. (Reuters)

Monday, September 6, 2004

Mass funerals took place in Beslan. Two days of national mourning began in Russia.



Relatives of victims who died in the Beslan school hostage siege carry coffins under the heavy rain at the cemetery in Beslan, North Ossetia, 06 September 2004. (AFP Photo/Viktor Drachev)



Relatives of victims (no names given) of the Russian hostage siege mourn in Beslan, North Ossetia, 07 September 2004. (AFP Photo/Viktor Drachev)

The aftermath of the Beslan hostage crisis

A decade on, the survivors of the tragedy still cannot forget those terrible days they spent on the verge of death. Those who lost their loved ones do not believe their psychological wounds will ever heal. They keep coming to site of the attack – which has since been turned into a memorial – and to the cemetery, the City of Angels, one of the rare graveyards in North Ossetia where both Christians and Muslims were laid to rest.



Survivors of the Beslan massacre mourn around a makeshift memorial of flowers and bottles of water at the gymnasium of the destroyed school No. 1 in Beslan, North Ossetia, 08 September 2004. (AFP Photo/Viktor Drachev)

"There are no Muslims and Christians here. They are children. They are innocent creature. And all people come [to the cemetery] – Christians and Muslims...They come in tears and go in tears," Kaspolt Ramonov, the keeper at the City of Angels told RT. His family was taken hostage in 2004. The wife and son seriously injured and his eldest daughter was killed.



A woman, who lost relatives in the Beslan hostage crisis, shouts at the new premier of North Ossetia, Alan Boradzov (L) as demonstrators demand a meeting with North Ossetian president Alexander Dzasokhov, during a protest in Vladikavkaz, 11 September 2004. (AFP Photo)





New school in Beslan, North Ossetia. It was built to replace the one destroyed by terrorists on September 1, 2004. Designed by Moscow architects, the school has custom-made equipment with a swimming pool, a theater, a library, a swimming pool and a winter garden. (RIA Novosti/Albina Olissova)



Candles at the Beslan Memorial as part of the commemorative events in memory of the September 1, 2004 terrorist attack in Beslan. (RIA Novosti/Anton Podgaiko)

◀ 4.8K ▶ 719 ▶ 34

204 comments

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Cyndi Wright 0

The most innocent and vulnerable were at the mercy of those who showed no mercy. I am American and I follow the school tragedies that have been leveled in the U.S. since Columbine. It is September. I am profoundly saddened by the anniversary of those hellish days in Beslan.

about 3 hours ago

Reply

Reco Ema 0

Russians and the rest of the world will never forget this egregious "gift" of the house of Saud and their jewish-money-aristocrat accomplices conjured to punish the Russian leaders for refusing to dance to their tune and open up their country and their people to unbridled exploitation and expropriation all in the name of "demon-cracy".

5 days ago 21:25

Reply

Ashwin Kumar 0

[quote name='Georgina Born' time='01.09.2014 20:05']It's interesting article doesn't mention that Russian special forces has stormed the school unnecessary, while Chechen freedom fighters wanted to negotiate - just to show that they don't negotiate with 'terrorists' and have no mercy for them. Russian authorities had choose risking children's life's and actually are guilty of the blood shed.[/quote]

Yeah these people responsible for the atrocities in Beslan are "freedom fighters" because they are killing Russians. Great logic indeed

5 days ago 19:47

Reply

dis gusting 0

[quote name='Quotations' time='02.09.2014 11:12']

Wikipedia: (...) In addition, there were serious accusations that federal officials had not earnestly tried to negotiate with the hostage-takers.

Sorry for you. Who accused the federal officials? US/EU or Wikipedia? What is wikipedia? Were those accused at the scene? Affected will always accuse. This is a norm. US accused Assad claim he used chemical weapon on his own people claiming had hard evidence and wanted to attack. Russia submitted evidence. What about US's evidence and why was the attack cordoned off?

5 days ago 17:02

Reply



Quotations

0

[quote name='dis gusting' time='02.09.2014 00:44']Russian leadership was negotiating for 3 days. They did not charge in immediately.[/quote]

Wikipedia: (...) In addition, there were serious accusations that federal officials had not earnestly tried to negotiate with the hostage-takers (including the alleged threat from Moscow to arrest President Dzasokhov if he came to negotiate) and deliberately provided incorrect and inconsistent reports of the situation to the media.

6 days ago 03:12

Reply



dis gusting

0

information about the operation but which country in this planet has ever released a honest and full full report starting with US. US blamed Russia for downing MH-17 even before the investigation started but why has everyone become so quiet including Netherlands? Noone else is talking about it and Russian Ambassador to UN Mr. Vitaly is the only one seem to press for the result. So what and who has given the right or accuse Russia in this world?

6 days ago 00:04

Reply



dis gusting

0

@Pawel Barkley, not comforting by saying others do worse things. Can Russia be as bad as US? Russia till this day have not used weapon of mass destruction to kill anyone in the world. US has. Russian weapons are considered as inferior to US because US has tested them. Russia do not do such things just to test how good thier weapon are or to sell it to others. So, why the world being so biased against Russia? including yourself. Meaning, in bible it is being said "who he believe have not sinned should throw the stone first." So who has the right to claim Russia is bad or doing wrong? Everyone claim Russia has withheld

6 days ago 00:01

Reply



Pawel Barkley

0

[quote name='dis gusting' time='02.09.2014 00:48'] Why no one including the HRW not asking US they are killing people indiscriminately. Those dead include women, children and general public but noone is talking about it.[/quote]

Why Russian people (at least RT redactors writing in this forum) always tries to explain Russia doing something wrong with US which in their view can do even worse. If something is bad, name it properly. Don't comfort yourself that someone can do even worse.

6 days ago 22:23

Reply



dis gusting

0

there were many civilians and the relatives of the hostages had weapons in thier hand and wanted to charge in. If the leadership and the soldiers were not human, many officers would not have died shielding the victims who were running away from the terrorists. It is written in the wikipedia and you should read it carefully. Noone will know for sure about what had happened on that day. Why no one including the HRW not asking US they are killing people indiscriminately. Those dead include women, children and general public but noone is talking about it.

6 days ago 16:48

Reply



dis gusting

0

@Quotations, so you cut and paste from wikipedia. what is your point? Blaming Putin for the death of the hostages? wikipedia just an information board. However, you have mentioned in your message such as the HRW was there at the scene. Russian leadership was negotiating for 3 days. They did not charge in immediately. If Russian leadership had never agreed to thier demands, do you think they would have released the hostages? They would have killed them anyway. So what is your US suggesting, give in to everything the terrorist demanded for. If this had happened in US, would it have turned otherwise? Looking at the video

6 days ago 16:44

Reply

Next comments

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