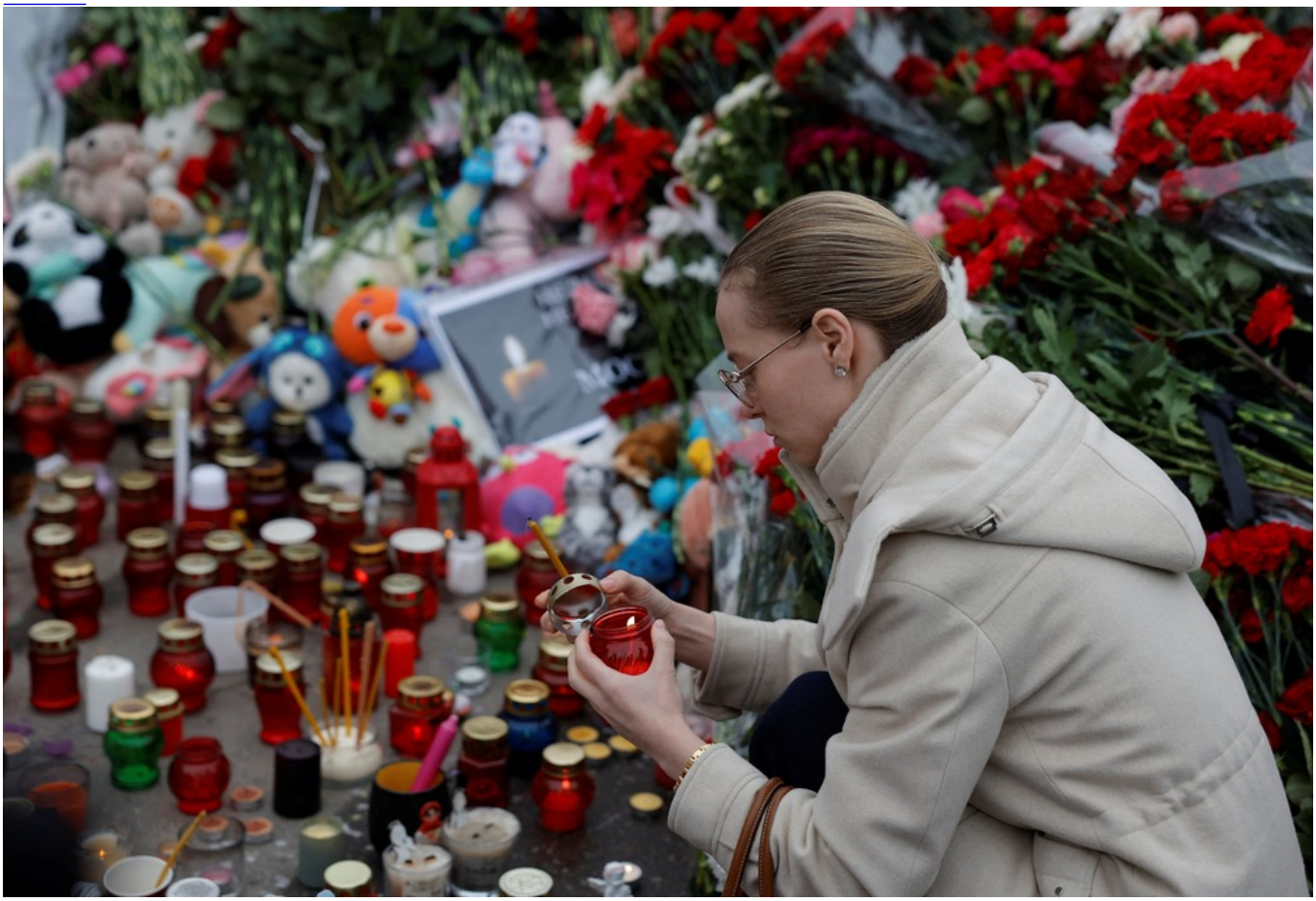
News



A woman lights a candle at a makeshift memorial March 24, 2024, outside the Crocus City Hall concert venue following a shooting incident, outside Moscow March 22. Assailants burst into the concert hall and sprayed the crowd with gunfire, killing over 130 people, injuring more than 100 and setting fire to the venue. (OSV News/Maxim Shemetov, Reuters)



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Moscow — March 25, 2024

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Russia's Catholic archbishop has echoed condemnations of a March 22 terror assault which left dozens dead and injured at a Moscow concert venue, although a bishop from war-torn Ukraine warned the atrocity should also remind Russians of what his country was suffering at their hands.

"Our hearts are filled with horror and pain — but we … (should) not forget our lives are in God's hands," said Archbishop Paolo Pezzi, who heads the Moscow-based Mother of God Archdiocese.

"Trusting in him, I ask you to pray for the salvation of all whose lives are still in danger, peace for the dead, help and healing for the injured, and courage and patience for all called to help them."

The archbishop issued the statement March 23 following the overnight attack by gunmen on the Crocus concert hall in the capital's Krasnogorsk suburb, which claimed more than 130 lives and left over 100 injured.

He said he wished to support everyone affected by the "brutal terrorist attack," while also urging Russians to "exercise due care and discretion" for their "personal and public safety," and continue "witnessing to hope in these dark times."

However, a Ukrainian bishop said he feared the attack would also serve as a "great provocation," enabling Vladimir Putin's government to "inflame international opinion" and "justify the terrible acts" committed against his country.

"Our soldiers and civilians are being shot at and shelled every day by Russian forces, who are also destroying our energy and water supplies in a great tragedy of death and suffering," said Auxiliary Bishop Jan Sobilo of Kharkiv-Zaporizhzhia, which witnessed increased Russian attacks in recent weeks.

"Russians should be reflecting right now on where Putin's policies are leading them, and thinking seriously and realistically about their own future," he said. "If things continue as they are, it's Russia which will be destabilized, and it will bear the guilt itself."

Ukraine's government denied any involvement in the Krasnogorsk atrocity, which was claimed March 22 by the Islamist ISIS terror group, while U.S. officials said they had warned Moscow of an imminent terrorist attack.

However, in a March 23 TV address, Putin said four assailants had been apprehended heading "towards Ukraine," adding that a "window" had been "prepared for them from the Ukrainian side to cross the state border."

He added that Russia's Federal Security Service, the FSB, had arrested a total of 11 and was working to identify "who provided them with transport, planned escape routes from the crime scene, and prepared caches of weapons and ammunition."

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Meanwhile, Russia's Orthodox patriarch expressed "deep shock" at the attack, and urged Russians "not to lose faith, but maintain courage and fortitude."

"The crime committed is striking in its cynicism and cruelty," Patriarch Kirill said in an overnight message.

"I am confident law enforcement agencies and special services will do everything possible to solve this brazen crime successfully as soon as possible, and bring to justice those responsible."

However, an exiled Russian historian and politician, Andrei Zubov, told Italy's Servizio Informazione Religiosa March 23 the attack had also exposed the vulnerability of ordinary citizens, and raised questions about how Moscow's special services had "deprived us of civil rights and fundamental freedoms, while missing

such a large-scale, well-prepared terrorist attack."

Meanwhile, Sobilo said the atrocity should remind "wise Russians" of the enormities perpetrated in Ukraine, especially among families whose sons had been "sent off to a cruel war and killed."

However, he also warned that those "unthinkingly subject to official propaganda" would be "captivated even more by hatred for other countries."

"In St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus says those who died in Jerusalem's collapsing Siloam tower were no guiltier than other citizens, but warns everyone will similarly perish unless they repent," the auxiliary bishop told OSV News.

"Since we don't know what individual Russians think, we can't evaluate personal guilt and innocence," he said. "All we can say for certain is that Russia is making a terrible mistake in untruthfully presenting current events and fuelling public support for war by suggesting Russia is in danger."

The Orthodox Moscow Patriarchate said March 23 funeral services for victims, who died from gunshots and poisoning, were already taking place at local churches, adding that its Odintsovo diocese had set up a hotline for counseling by priests and psychologists. Meanwhile, a day of national mourning was declared for March 24 by Putin, who chaired a meeting of Russia's Security Council March 22 on "measures to combat the spread of neo-Nazi ideas."

In his OSV News interview, Sobilo said his Zaporizhzhia home region had come under fresh Russian shellfire March 23, adding that Ukrainian Catholics hoped upcoming Holy Week and Easter events could take place, despite a widely expected spring escalation in fighting.

He added that Ukrainian forces should be expected to step up strikes against military targets inside Russia "in their own defense efforts," and were aware this would "incite ever greater anger and aggression among Russians."

"The world must look prudently at what's happening, and see how these war actions are becoming ever more dangerous not just for Ukraine," the Kharkiv-Zaporizhzhia auxiliary bishop told OSV News.

"Two years ago, Putin himself pressed the button for Russia's self-destruction, and everything happening today — the aggression, hatred and lying — is flowing back

into Russian society," he said. "Although sensible Russians can do nothing now because the control is so total, they should ask themselves if it's really worth sitting quietly and waiting for something to change, or whether they shouldn't now wake up and seek changes themselves. As Christ told us, he who lives by the sword will die by the sword."

A Russian lay Catholic told OSV News prayers had been said for victims of the Crocus attack at March 23 Masses in Moscow, but said she had not recognized any Catholic names on the official list of victims.

She added that most Russians would not believe official accounts of the outrage and the latest reported arrests.

"There haven't been so many dead in any terrorist attack in Russia — and I'm seeing reactions of horror, sadness and hopelessness," said the lay Catholic, a university lecturer who also works with Caritas.

"There's also fear that the response to this attack will be tightened domestic legislation, increased repression and a new mobilization. Despite the huge numbers of police, guards and security personnel, they could do nothing to ensure the protection and safety of people."

The woman said that most of her Catholic friends had gone to donate blood on March 23 for the victims of the attack to offer "comfort and support."