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Address by President Vladimir Putin

Speaking is hard. It is painful.

A terrible tragedy has taken place in our world. Over these last few days each and every one of us has suffered greatly and taken deeply to heart all that was happening in the Russian town of Beslan. There, we found ourselves confronting not just murderers, but people who turned their weapons against helpless children.

I would like now, first of all, to address words of support and condolence to those people who have lost what we treasure most in this life – our children, our loved and dear ones.

I ask that we all remember those who lost their lives at the hands of terrorists over these last days.

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Russia has lived through many tragic events and terrible ordeals over the course of its history. Today, we live in a time that follows the collapse of a vast and great state, a state that, unfortunately, proved unable to survive in a rapidly changing world. But despite all the difficulties, we were able to preserve the core of what was once the vast Soviet Union, and we named this new country the Russian Federation.

We all hoped for change, change for the better. But many of the changes that took place in our lives found us unprepared. Why is this?

We are living at a time of an economy in transition, of a political system that does not yet correspond to the state and level of our society's development.

We are living through a time when internal conflicts and interethnic divisions that were once firmly suppressed by the ruling ideology have now flared up.

We stopped paying the required attention to defence and security issues and we allowed corruption to undermine our judicial and law enforcement system.

Furthermore, our country, formerly protected by the most powerful defence system along the length of its external frontiers overnight found itself defenceless both from the east and the west.

It will take many years and billions of roubles to create new, modern and genuinely protected borders.

But even so, we could have been more effective if we had acted professionally and at the right moment.

In general, we need to admit that we did not fully understand the complexity and the dangers of the processes at work in our own country and in the world. In any case, we proved unable to react adequately. We showed ourselves to be weak. And the weak get beaten.

Some would like to tear from us a “juicy piece of pie”. Others help them. They help, reasoning that Russia still remains one of the world’s major nuclear powers, and as such still represents a threat to them. And so they reason that this threat should be removed.

Terrorism, of course, is just an instrument to achieve these aims.

As I have said many times already, we have found ourselves confronting crises, revolts and terrorist acts on more than one occasion. But what has happened now, this crime committed by terrorists, is unprecedented in its inhumanness and cruelty. This is not a challenge to the President, parliament or government. It is a challenge to all of Russia, to our entire people. Our country is under attack.

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The terrorists think they are stronger than us. They think they can frighten us with their cruelty, paralyse our will and sow disintegration in our society. It would seem that we have a choice - either to resist them or to agree to their demands. To give in, to let them destroy and plunder Russia in the hope that they will finally leave us in peace.

As the President, the head of the Russian state, as someone who swore an oath to defend this country and its territorial integrity, and simply as a citizen of Russia, I am convinced that in reality we have no choice at all. Because to allow ourselves to be blackmailed and succumb to panic would be to immediately condemn millions of people to an endless series of bloody conflicts like those of Nagorny Karabakh, Trans-Dniester and other similar tragedies. We should not turn away from this obvious fact.

What we are dealing with are not isolated acts intended to frighten us, not isolated terrorist attacks. What we are facing is direct intervention of international terror directed against Russia. This is a total, cruel and full-scale war that again and again is taking the lives of our fellow citizens.

World experience shows us that, unfortunately, such wars do not end quickly. In this situation we simply cannot and should not live in as carefree a manner as previously. We must create a much more effective security system and we must demand from our law enforcement agencies action that corresponds to the level and scale of the new threats that have emerged.

But most important is to mobilise the entire nation in the face of this common danger. Events in other countries have shown that terrorists meet the most effective resistance in places where they not only encounter the state’s power but also find themselves facing an organised and united civil society.

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Dear fellow citizens,

Those who sent these bandits to carry out this dreadful crime made it their aim to set our peoples against each other, put fear into the hearts of Russian citizens and unleash bloody interethnic strife in the North Caucasus. In this connection I have the following words to say.

First, a series of measures aimed at strengthening our country's unity will soon be prepared.

Second, I think it is necessary to create a new system of coordinating the forces and means responsible for exercising control over the situation in the North Caucasus. Third, we need to create an effective anti-crisis management system including entirely new approaches to the way the law enforcement agencies work.

I want to stress that all of these measures will be implemented in full accordance with our country's Constitution.

Dear friends,

We are living through very difficult and painful days. I would like now to thank all those who showed endurance and responsibility as citizens.

We were and always will be stronger than them, stronger through our morals, our courage and our sense of solidarity.

I saw this again last night.

In Beslan, which is literally soaked with grief and pain, people were showing care and support for each other more than ever.

They were not afraid to risk their own lives in the name of the lives and peace of others.

Even in the most inhuman conditions they remained human beings.

It is impossible to accept the pain caused by such loss, but these trials have brought us even closer together and have forced us to re-evaluate a lot of things.

Today we must be together, for it is only together that we will vanquish the enemy.