

Beslan hostage crisis: Russia held in breach of Article 2 ECHR

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The European Court of Human Rights has held that Russia acted in violation of Article 2 of the ECHR in its failures in relation to the Beslan hostage crisis.

On 1 September 2004, during a celebration of the start of the academic year, terrorists attacked a school in Beslan, Russia. Over 1,000 people were held captive, most of whom were children, over the next 50 hours. By the time the siege was over, over 330 people (including over 180 children) had lost their lives.

Victims of the attack and their family members brought claims to the European Court of Human Rights. They argued that Russia had breached its obligations under Article 2 (the right to life). In its long judgment, the Court found in their favour, concluding that Russia had violated Article 2. In particular, it held that:

1. There was a failure to take adequate preventive measures in light of the information and risks known to the authorities.
2. There was a failure to carry out a full and effective investigation of the events, in particular to determine whether or not force used by the security services was or was not justified, and also due to the limited information provided to the victims and their families.
3. There were serious shortcomings in the planning, control and coordination of the security operation.
4. While the use of lethal force was justified, the force used by the security services, and in particular the use of indiscriminate weapons, was in violation of Article 2.

It did not find that there had been a violation of the right to a remedy, guaranteed by Article 13.

The Judgment and the Court's press release can be found under external links.

Jennifer MacLeod was instructed by the European Human Rights Advocacy Centre for the "first group of applicants", to assist in the written procedure before the Court.

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