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FEATURED

Crowd gathers in Albuquerque on two-year anniversary of Ukraine invasion

By Matthew Reisen / Journal Staff Writer
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Halyna Pernarovska holds a photograph to her forehead and cries on Saturday at Civic Plaza in Albuquerque during the second anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Chancey Bush/Journal

Two years to the day after Russia invaded Ukraine, dozens crowded Civic Plaza in Downtown Albuquerque on Saturday to mourn the thousands killed and missing in the war.

Those gathered also asked for the United States to continue providing aid and munitions to Ukraine, which have been held up by Republicans in Congress.

Nataliya Edelman, president of the Ukrainian Americans of New Mexico, rang a large gold bell “for peace and resilience.” The Ukrainian national anthem was played, followed by the American national anthem.

Then, a different sound filled the area around the plaza stage: the droning of air raid sirens.

“Practically every night this is the sound that every Ukrainian hears,” said Edelman, who was raised in Bucha. “Our kids wake up to this sound.”

Edelman called Feb. 24 an annual reminder of “the most horrible day ever” for Ukrainians and warned that Russian President Vladimir Putin “is not going to stop.”

The commemoration came almost a year after Albuquerque established a Sister Cities International relationship with Kharkiv, Ukraine, an endeavor to “promote peace and prosperity by creating bonds between people from different cities around the world.”

The Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation sponsored Saturday’s gathering, where many attendees carried Ukrainian flags or had them draped over their shoulders like a cape.

The Al Hurricane Pavilion was lined with signs that read, “Say no to Putin” and “Pray for Ukraine,” near a tiny coffin and linens covered in fake blood.

Envoys for local leaders spoke in solidarity before there was a candlelighting and a moment of silence for those killed and missing since the war began.

Dick and Karen Barrett listened to the speakers intently, each of them holding a tiny Ukrainian flag. The couple said they had no ties to Ukraine or heritage there, but shared in the “moral outrage.”

“I’m adamantly opposed to what Russia is doing,” Dick Barrett said. His wife, Karen, added, “It makes me sick to my stomach.”

The Barretts said Congress needs to act in support of Ukraine, something they believed has waned since the war began.

Recently, former President Donald Trump spoke out against supporting Ukraine and House Republicans have repeatedly blocked an aid package.

“I think people have fatigue,” Karen Barrett said, lamenting the low turnout at the commemoration.

Still, she hoped Congress “gets the message” from the show of support happening across the country and globe on Saturday.

Luda Kostyk, who moved from western Ukraine to New Mexico 20 years ago, said she feels horrible about what’s happening in her homeland “every day, every hour, every minute.”

Kostyk created the group New Mexicans Helping Ukraine, collecting donations and supplies — from alcohol swabs to ambulances — to send to Ukraine.

She said she is working to make sure people don’t lose sight of the country’s struggle. Kostyk said those in Ukraine, from volunteers to leaders, are begging for Ukrainian Americans to “speak up.”

“People are forgetting what is really going on in Ukraine right now,” she said. “And Ukrainians are not going to stop, they’re going to fight till their last breath, until the last person.”

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Photos: Commemoration of second anniversary of full scale Russian invasion of Ukraine at Civic Plaza

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