



International Bible Society

## Comfort to Victims in Beslan, Russia

[By Pavel Novak, IBS-Europe Director of Communication]



International Bible Society – Europe

Kratka 8, 110 00 Praha 10 Czech Republic

Tel: +420 274 780 118

Fax: +420 274 780 117

[PNovak@eur.ibs.org](mailto:PNovak@eur.ibs.org)

### Saved by blood

***“We are your rescuers. You are free.’ Those were the most desirable words I could ever hear,” said Irina after it all was over.***

*“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” Ephesians 1:7 NIV*



They were all dressed up for breakfast that morning and in a good mood. Why not, for this was the first day of the new school year. 8 year old Mark and his 9 year old brother Arthur were looking forward to meeting their classmates again. How proud their mother Irina was to have such eager and smart sons. Contentment and peace reigned that morning around the table. After breakfast the two brothers urged their mother to hurry so that they would arrive at school on time. However, there was also a group of thirty-two terrorists hurrying to the school that morning. The 30,000 residents of Beslan were unsuspecting as they went about their daily routines.

Irina and many other parents accompanied their children to Beslan’s Middle School Number One on the first of September. During the annual welcome ceremony the terrorists rushed into school loudly shouting. Men with masks on their faces ordered all of the adults and children to be silent and motionless. Explosives were all around. For nearly three days the hostages were kept in the school which seemed like an eternity to all of them.

*“The longer we were kept there, the more it was clear that we could not escape unharmed,” said Irina, mother of Mark and Arthur.*

*“But the worst suffering was caused by the strict forbiddance of drinking water. Risking my life, I was bringing water discreetly to both of my boys. The others were dying of thirst.*

On September 1, the morning of the first day of school, a group of around thirty armed men and women stormed Beslan’s Middle School Number One, whose pupils are aged from seven to eighteen years old. After an exchange of gunfire with police, in which five officers were killed, the attackers seized the school building, taking 1181 people hostage, most under the age of eighteen.



The gym where hostages were kept

*September 3 dawned sultry and stifling hot. Arthur was exhausted by then, and asked me if we could move closer to door, because there was a slight draft there. It was very dangerous but we were able to move successfully, and Arthur improved a little bit. He was asking me over and over: ‘Mum, I have been praying to God for deliverance for three days now, but he hasn’t responded so far.’ I said to him, ‘Arthur, God is listening to us all the time, but even if we die, Jesus takes us to*



*Irina*

*heaven.’ Arthur replied, ‘Yes, I know Mum that Jesus takes us to heaven, but hopefully it will be later because now I want my Daddy holding me closely. I miss him so much.’*

*The next moment there was a terrific bang. I drew Mark, who was sitting at my feet, to myself. During the first explosion Arthur was hit in the head by shrapnel. I tried but I couldn’t stop the bleeding with only my bare hands. I prayed then, ‘Lord, I can’t do anything – You are still in control.’ I gave him artificial respiration and he started breathing again. He needed first aid urgently, but running away was impossible. Terrorists were shouting to any who tried to escape. I knew Arthur would not survive without medical care because he was bleeding heavily. We gave him a sweet parting kiss, held him tightly and remained motionless.*

*After a time one of the terrorists permitted us to drink and ordered us to run away from the room because the roof was burning and collapsing. We tried to get away but were captured again by other terrorists. They forced us into the dining room and kept us there until the very end. I wanted to conceal Mark in an iron cabinet, but I worried that he would be frightened to death by being alone; so I did not find the courage enough to do so. We hid under the table and I prayed for a sudden death. I was thinking of my other three children left at home with my husband, praying that they would never have to be sent to an orphanage.*

On September 2, negotiations proved unsuccessful, and terrorists refused even to allow food, water and medicines to be taken in for the hostages or for the bodies of the dead to be removed from the school. Many hostages, especially children, took off their shirts and other articles of clothing because of the sweltering heat within. In the afternoon, 26 women and infants were freed by the gunmen following new negotiations. Some of the mothers with two children were forced to choose one to take with them, and leave the others behind.

The Beslan school massacre occurred on September 3. After the three-day standoff, there was a shootout between the hostage-takers and Russian security forces, leaving an aftermath of more than 335 people killed (156 of them children), over 200 missing and more than 700 wounded.

*Suddenly gunfight broke out. The terrorists pushed the children out of the windows and forced them to scream to stop soldiers from shooting at the school. Fearing that terrorists would take my son away from me, I held Mark tightly and told him to pretend to be dead. I covered us both with a piece of metal sheeting. I found and waited to see what would happen. There were puddles of blood all around us. I took a blood-stained curtain, dipped it into the blood and covered both of us with it. I asked Mark not to*

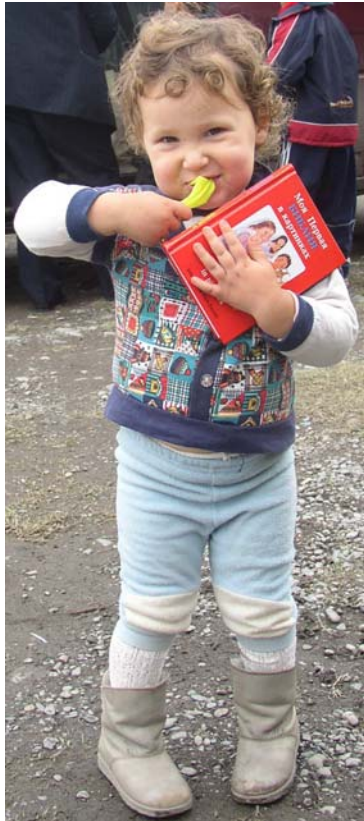
*respond to any order given by terrorists when they were searching for survivors. ‘Only the ones considered to be dead will survive’, I thought.*

*Soon I could hear some voices. A woman lying close to us with her 12 year old daughter told us the most amazing news, “Stand up. It is all over. The soldiers are ours”. I opened my eyes slightly and saw a man attired in a uniform, holding a submachine gun. “Who are you?” I asked distrustfully. “We are your rescuers. You are free.” I was fully aware that someone’s shed blood saved our lives.”*



*Grandfather grieve over his grandson*

The blood of others' lives literally saved Irina and Mark. Now they understand more deeply Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Despite the sorrow Irina has over losing Arthur, she is grateful to God for saving the rest of her family. Her husband was close to school in the car together with two of their other children when the fighting flared up. Terrorists shot at the car, but they were able to escape unharmed.



On Sunday, September 12, literature was taken and delivered by IBS staff member, Vladimir, who lives and works in the North Caucasus region of Russia. *Jesus and His Life* and *My First Bible* were given out to comfort and bring peace in Jesus. To date, IBS is the only organization to distribute Scripture.

**IBS will print and distribute more Scriptures to the grieving people of Beslan, so please join us in the effort to bring God's Word of hope, comfort and peace.**



*Mark in black jacket, left*

***“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”***

II Corinthians 1: 3-4, NIV