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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO PROVIDES UPDATE ON BUILDING COLLAPSE IN THE EAST VILLAGE**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** I want to give everyone an update on this terrible tragedy that occurred in the East Village yesterday. I first want to say, for all of us who are working to address so many concerns and so many people, our hearts go out to the families of all who were affected and to the people of the neighborhood who have seen such horrible disruption the last 24 hours.

A lot of people right now feeling the effects of this tragedy and our thoughts and prayers are with them. And we are working non-stop to try to address the many issues now in the neighborhood. I've visited this site this morning – obviously, total devastation of three buildings. One other suffered tremendous fire damage. You rarely see a scene of such devastation in the middle of a city like this as the site is still smoldering. The fire department is actively fighting the fire on the site.

This was, you know, 24 hours ago a vibrant bustling street and today people are dealing with the aftermath of this tragedy. The response by all of our first responders was exceptional. I want to emphasize this, the fire department arrived on the scene within minutes. This was a very complicated, dangerous situation. Four buildings deeply affected – obviously, the surrounding buildings potentially at risk; an ever changing and very dangerous dynamic for all of our first responders. I particularly want to thank FDNY, our firefighters, and their leadership responded brilliantly in the midst of, again, a complex and dangerous situation.

I've talked to a number of the firefighters; I've talked to some of their officers, and many of them said that this was one of the toughest fires they had seen in a long time because of the nature of the explosion, and the way it undermined more than one of the buildings, and the threat of building collapse looming at all times. Notwithstanding that extraordinary challenge our firefighters did an amazing job of going through all of the buildings, addressing not just the fire but, of course, looking for signs of life, and doing so at great personal dangers themselves. So, the professionalism, the bravery, the courage of the FDNY were entirely on display in the last 24 hours. All of the other first responders working with FDNY did a fantastic job as well. A lot of people here representing a lot of the different agencies, I'll acknowledge them in a moment but let me give you the overview.

Obviously, I will start as I did yesterday by saying, there's an ongoing investigation. There's a lot more we need to learn. We will not have all the facts until we can access 121 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue fully, and particularly get into the basement area. That's going to take time because of the amount of debris that's been created. So, we are going to give you preliminary information and keep updating it as we go along.

Again, three buildings collapsed. The fourth very seriously damaged by fire. From what we know at this moment, and this is again preliminary, it appears to be a gas explosion but there's a lot more we need to learn about the details. The fire, again, continues. Thank God it's just smoldering at this point, but it can flare up some as the debris is cleared away. So, there's going to be a very heavy FDNY presence as that operation continues. Once debris is largely cleared and the fire is fully extinguished then there will be the ability to do a

full investigation, of course, a full clean-up of the area. That will take days, I want to emphasize at this point it will take days. We do not have a firm deadline for you yet but it will take, certainly, several days possibly as much as most of a week to get all of that debris out of the area and make the area entirely normal again. We're going to be very cautious about how we handle the surrounding area; how we handle traffic and even foot traffic in the area. FDNY is going to make decisions based, of course, on safety and the clean-up operation when we can open up 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue; when we can allow normal foot traffic, but I want people to keep their expectations low on that level because we have to do this very carefully. We have to make sure that the debris is cleared.

In terms of the human impact, and it is a very painful reality – 22 people injured. Thank God 18 of those injured do not have life-threatening injuries – four, however, have critical injuries. So, four of the 22 have critical injuries. At this moment, still no fatalities reported. Now, that being said, we have two people that we know for sure are unaccounted for. And there may be more, we are still gathering information but two people based on eyewitness accounts unaccounted for. We are continuing the effort to confirm that and seeing if there's any other individuals that we need to look for.

All of our first responders, again, did an extraordinary job. This was very dangerous – six members of the FDNY were injured in this operation, again, thank God all were non-life-threatening injuries. People, of course, are deeply concerned about their loved ones and those who may have been affected, not just who lived in the buildings who may have been in the restaurant or may have even been walking by. Please call 3-1-1 if you either are trying to confirm the whereabouts of a loved one or if you have information to offer about someone who may be missing.

We have a center that has been set up to help anyone affected by this tragedy. It is now – it was at one location yesterday, it has now been moved to the Tompkins Square Library at 331 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street. A variety of services available for all those in need there including medicine, mental health services, the different things people need immediately. We're also working, of course, to make sure there is temporary housing for all who need it. We provided temporary housing for 30 individuals, so far, out of the 84 people who have registered for a variety of types of help.

We'll talk later on about the process of re-inhabiting a number of the buildings surrounding the site. There will be some obviously – some individuals who need long-term housing because their building is gone, and we will be working immediately to achieve not just temporary but long term housing for all those displaced. At this moment, 11 buildings with 144 residential units were evacuated. Again, some will be re-inhabited soon, others it looks like more likely on Sunday. We're still fine-tuning that, again, in connection with safety considerations and debris removal operations. Department of Buildings will be inspecting all of the surrounding buildings to assure safety before any of them are re-inhabited. We have ongoing efforts by the Department of Health and the Department of Environmental Protection to monitor air quality and to monitor for any substances on the site at this moment. Department of Health reports that air quality has returned to normal levels in the surrounding area.

Our Department of Small Businesses Services is working with a number of businesses that have been adversely affected; obviously, some destroyed others damaged and obviously all of them not in a position to be open for business, so we'll be working with them to help them out.

Very important for those who want to help the families that were affected by this tragedy, there is a number of ways to do so; one is through the Mayor's Fund, which responded with great effectiveness after the East Harlem tragedy. We encourage people to donate to the Mayor's Fund to help the families that had such a negative impact on their lives. Obviously, other charities are stepping in as well and we thank them.

Look, this will be an ongoing situation. We'll be giving you a number of updates. There's going to be a lot to learn in the investigation. There's going to be a lot that we have to update people on in terms of the life of the neighborhood and how we can return it to normal. I hope all the people of New York City, while we feel pain over those who are right now fighting for their lives and all of the people whose lives have been turned upside down. I hope at the same time we appreciate that we are blessed by the finest first responders anywhere in the

world. This is absolutely extraordinary, what our first responders did here and should be a cause for comfort in the midst of this pain.

The city – we’ve said it before but it’s fundamentally true – this city knows how to handle adversity. We never welcome it – we know it will come but we know how to handle it. People band together; people help each other out. A – great acts of kindness and acts of bravery yesterday. Not just our first responders on-duty; we had an off-duty firefighter who literally went into the danger off-duty, happened to be in the neighborhood, climbed up the fire escape externally to look into different apartments to see if there were any individuals in those apartments. So, answer the call even while off-duty and put his own life in danger. We had individuals who came and pulled a woman to safety – just bystanders who saw a woman’s life in danger and got her away from one of the buildings as it was collapsing. People stepped up and helped their fellow New Yorkers and it made a world of difference. And thank God we haven’t lost anyone yet and part of it is because of these extraordinary efforts. I want to say a few words in Spanish. I’m going to announce – introduce everyone who’s here and then call upon Commissioner Nigro and Commissioner Esposito.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

Okay, let me give you a sense of all of the people and agencies here; of course, our First Deputy Mayor Tony Shorris; you’ll hear again from our Fire Commissioner Dan Nigro and our OEM Commissioner Joe Esposito in a moment; we have our Buildings Commissioner Rick Chandler, our Housing Commissioner Vicky Bean; we have Chief Leonard of the FDNY – Chief of Department; NYPD Chief of Detectives Bob Boyce; Deputy Chief of Manhattan Detectives, Bill Aubry. We have my senior advisor Gabrielle Fialkoff, who has the Mayor’s Fund among other things under her leadership. We have among – also from – I’m sorry – also from the NYPD, the Commanding Officer of Patrol Borough Manhattan South Assistant Chief, Bill Morris. We have the Con Ed President, Craig Ivey, who we’ve been working very closely with in the last 24 hours. And then we thank Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Councilmember Rosie Mendez, and State Senator Brad Hoylman all for being here.

Now, to give you a fuller update, our Fire Commissioner Dan Nigro.

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