

Red Cross Paves Way for Russian Aid Convoy to Enter Ukraine

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Red Cross officials entered eastern Ukraine on Wednesday to smooth the planned delivery of relief supplies aboard a Russian aid convoy, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said.

The convoy has been stuck at the Russia-Ukraine border for nearly a week due to Ukrainian concerns it could serve as a Trojan horse to infiltrate military supplies to pro-Russian separatists in the area. Moscow says the mission is purely humanitarian in support of civilians trapped by the conflict.

"An advance ICRC team crossed into eastern Ukraine this morning, having received security guarantees from groups controlling the territory for this mission. The team is checking conditions of the road, and the general situation, and establishing contacts in preparation for the passage of the convoy," ICRC spokesman Ewan Watson said in Geneva.

"Obviously, this is a very positive step, it certainly brings us closer," he said.

But the ICRC had no time frame for when the cross-border aid operation might start as Ukrainian authorities had yet to begin inspecting cargo on the approximately 260 trucks, Watson said.

ICRC officials and vehicles are expected to accompany the Russian trucks and their drivers once they get the green light.

The Russian convoy carrying 2,000 tons of water, baby food and other humanitarian aid left Moscow on Aug. 12, arriving at the border a few days later.

Despite renewed diplomatic effort to end the conflict this week, Ukrainian forces fought street battles with the rebels in the eastern town of Ilovaisk overnight into Wednesday as they sought to isolate separatist strongholds near the border, an Interior Ministry official said in Kiev.

Government forces are gaining the upper hand after fighting for four months to quell rebellions in its Russian-speaking east and are steadily tightening the squeeze on rebels in their two big bastions of Donetsk and Luhansk.

See also:

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