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Russia Announces Start to 'Humanitarian Pause' in Syria's Ghouta

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Bassam Khabieh / Reuters

The Russian government has announced the start of a "humanitarian pause" for the rebel-held enclave of eastern Ghouta near the Syrian capital.

Russian-backed Syrian forces have been accused of indiscriminate shelling leading to the deaths of hundreds of civilians in their assault on Ghouta. The UN Security Council passed a resolution this weekend demanding a month-long truce in Syria to allow humanitarian access to besieged areas and areas under deadly bombardment.

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On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the implementation of daily "humanitarian pauses" in the fighting around eastern Ghouta, the state-run TASS news agency reported.

A five-hour ceasefire in the city began on Tuesday at 9 a.m. local time and is set to close at 2 p.m., the Reuters news agency reported.

The Syrian government military and its Russian allies have reportedly set up humanitarian corridors for the evacuation of civilians from eastern Ghouta to Damascus, according to TASS.

In comments made on Monday, the Kremlin's spokesperson denied Russia's complicity in the deaths of civilians and accused "local terrorists," including Jabhat al-Nusra, a terrorist organization banned in Russia, of using human shields in the city.

Eastern Ghouta has been one of the last strongholds for anti-government rebels in Syria's nearly eight-year war that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

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