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Putin Orders Voluntary Evacuation of Russians From Gaza

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Mohammed Abed / AFP

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a voluntary evacuation Thursday of Russian and ex-Soviet republic citizens from the Gaza Strip amid deadly violence between its Islamist rulers Hamas and Israel.

Putin's decree published on the government's legal portal comes 10 days after Hamas militants fired more than 4,000 rockets toward Israel and Israeli air strikes killed 230 Palestinians, including 65 children. Israeli police said that Hamas rockets, most of which were intercepted by Iron Dome air defenses, killed 12 people, including one child.

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The decree orders to "make provisions for the evacuation of citizens of the Russian Federation and citizens of the Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS] who have expressed such a wish."

Putin's decree orders Russia's SVR spy agency, the Emergency Situations Ministry and the Foreign Ministry to set specific evacuation timeframes.

Russia's cabinet of ministers is also ordered to implement measures needed to carry out the voluntary evacuations.

The United Nations said some 75,000 civilians have fled their homes in Gaza, a crowded enclave of 2 million people which has been under Israeli blockade for 14 years.

Russia's ambassador in Israel said in an interview published Thursday that Russian nationals have appealed to its diplomatic mission in the Palestinian National Authority for an evacuation from the conflict zone.

The state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported later Thursday that around 400 Russian and CIS citizens are listed among the Gaza evacuees.

Putin has joined world leaders in calling for a ceasefire between Israel and Palestinians.

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