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Ukraine Port City Mariupol Begins Evacuations

By AFP

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The evacuation would last over several days to allow the entirety of the civilian population to exit the city.
TASS / CTK Photo / Vladimir Prycek

Civilians will start being evacuated from the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol Saturday, city officials said, after surrounding Russian forces announced a ceasefire to allow its population to leave.

Mariupol, a southern city of about 450,000 people on the Azov Sea, will begin evacuations at 0900 GMT, city hall announced on social media in a message that added, "it will be possible to leave the city by private transport."

"A huge request to all drivers leaving the city, to contribute as much as possible to the evacuation of the civilian population — take people with you, fill vehicles as much as possible," the statement said.

The announcement said the evacuation would last over several days to allow the entirety of the civilian population to exit the city.

In the statement, city officials told residents leaving in private vehicles that it was "strictly prohibited" to go off course from the evacuation routes.

Municipal buses were also departing from three locations in the city to help people leave, the message said.

Ukraine Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk wrote on social media that some 200,000 people were expected to be extracted from the city.

She wrote that a further 15,000 people would be brought from Volnovakha, a town of around 20,000 people some 60 kilometers (38 miles) from separatist-controlled Donetsk, a regional center.

The Russian defense ministry earlier announced a ceasefire regime from 0700 GMT to allow for evacuations.

"This is not an easy decision, but, as I have always said, Mariupol is not its streets or houses. Mariupol is its population, it is you and me," mayor Vadim Boychenko was quoted as saying in the statement.

With Russian troops surrounding the city, he said, "there is no other option but to allow residents — that is, you and me — to leave Mariupol safely," he said.

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