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Russia Admits Conscripts 'Take Part' in Ukraine Operation

By AFP

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Stanislav Krasilnikov / TASS

The Russian army on Wednesday admitted for the first time that conscripts were taking part in Moscow's military advance in Ukraine, after President Vladimir Putin vowed only professional soldiers were there.

Since Moscow poured in troops to Ukraine on Feb. 24, there have been widespread reports of young conscripts fighting in the pro-Western country, with mothers of conscripts taking to social media to look for their sons and rights groups saying they were inundated with calls from conscripts' families.

On Monday, Putin said he will not send conscripts or reservists to fight in Ukraine and that only "professional" soldiers were taking part in the conflict.

Related article: Putin Says Will Not Send Conscripts or Reservists to Ukraine

The Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, Igor Konashenkov, said on Wednesday that some conscripts had been captured by Ukrainian forces.

"Unfortunately, several instances of the presence of conscripts in the units of the Russian Armed Forces participating in the special military operation on the territory of Ukraine have been confirmed," he said.

"Almost all such servicemen have already been withdrawn to Russian territory," he said.

But he said that some conscripts have been taken prisoner.

"At the same time, a sabotage group of the national battalion attacked one of the units performing logistical support," Konashenkov said.

"A number of servicemen, including conscripts, were captured," he added.

He said Moscow will take "measures to prevent sending conscripts to combat areas."

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov quickly said that before launching the Ukraine attack, Putin had told Russian army commanders to "categorically exclude" conscripts from the conflict and vowed to "punish" officials who sent them there.

Peskov said military prosecutors had been asked to "verify and legally assess the actions and punish officials responsible for violating this order."

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