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Russia Says Opening Corridor for Ukrainian Troops in Mariupol

By AFP

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Mariupol, Ukraine. **Alexei Alexandrov / AP Photo / TASS**

Moscow said Tuesday that Russian forces had opened a humanitarian corridor for Ukrainian troops who agreed to lay down their arms to leave the embattled city of Mariupol.

Some of the heaviest fighting of the Russian military campaign has focused around the strategic Sea of Azov port city.

"The Russian Armed Forces opened a humanitarian corridor for the withdrawal of Ukrainian military personnel who voluntarily laid down their arms and militants of nationalist formations," the Defense Ministry said, adding the safe corridor was opened at 2:00 p.m. (11:00 GMT).

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To that end, Russian forces and troops of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic "halted any military activity" around the Azovstal steelworks plant, Mikhail Mizintsev, head of the Russian National Defense Control Center, said in a statement.

The ministry said the decision was made taking into account the "catastrophic situation" at the plant and "purely humanitarian principles."

Humanitarian convoys have been deployed in "three directions" that include buses, cars and ambulances to transport and treat people.

Temporary accommodation and first aid facilities have also been set up, the ministry said.

Moscow urged Kyiv authorities to put pressure on the military "to stop the senseless resistance."

"But realizing that the commanders of Ukrainian units may not receive such orders and commands from the Kyiv authorities, we urge them to make such a decision on their own and to lay down their arms," the ministry said.

Mariupol offers a land bridge between Moscow-controlled parts of eastern Ukraine and the Kremlin-annexed peninsula of Crimea.

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