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Russia Says ‘Ready’ for Truce at Mariupol Plant

By AFP

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Smoke belches over the Azovstal iron and steel works in the city of Mariupol. The Russian Armed Forces are carrying out a special military operation in Ukraine. **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

Russia's Defense Ministry said Friday it was ready for a humanitarian ceasefire at Mariupol's Azovstal steel plant — the last stronghold of Ukrainian forces in the strategic port — if Kyiv's soldiers surrender.

Russia on Thursday said it had gained full control of the strategic eastern Ukraine city, except for its huge Azovstal industrial area.

President Vladimir Putin ordered a blockade of the steelworks, where hundreds of civilians are reportedly sheltering with Ukrainian troops.

"We once again declare that Russia is ready at any moment to introduce a regime of silence and announce a humanitarian pause for the evacuation of civilians," the Defense Ministry

said in a statement.

It added that the ceasefire would start with the "raising of white flags" by Ukraine's forces "along the entire perimeter or in certain areas of Azovstal."

"If such signs are found in any part of the Azovstal metallurgical plant, Russia's Armed Forces... will immediately stop any hostilities and provide a safe exit," the ministry added.

According to the ministry, civilians will be escorted to either territories controlled by Ukraine or to Russia, depending on their choice.

The surrendered Ukrainian soldiers will be "guaranteed" their life, it said.

"This statement will be continuously communicated to the Ukrainian formations at Azovstal on all radio channels every 30 minutes," the ministry said.

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