

'Nothing Left': Mariupol Picks up Pieces After Ferocious Fighting

By [AFP](#)

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TASS

The carcasses of charred buildings stand amid the lush greenery in what remains of the once bustling Ukrainian port city of Mariupol.

After weeks of siege and strikes much of the city on the coast of the Sea of Azov has been reduced to a wasteland.

As the last Ukrainian troops in the town surrendered to the Russians at the bombed-out Azovstal steel plant, passers-by mourned their fate.

Angela Kopytsa, a 52-year-old with bleached hair, said she saw no future for herself in Mariupol.

"There is no work, no food, no water," she said, adding that both her home and life had been "destroyed".

The city has lived without electricity since early March.

Kopytsa breaks into tears as she recounts how during the hostilities she had to share morsels of food with her children and grandson and how "children at maternity wards were dying of hunger".

"What future?" she said in Russian. "I have no hope for anything."

Three months of fighting in Mariupol have sent hundreds of thousands of people running for their lives and caused untold suffering and death.

Russia has pledged to rebuild the southeastern city and turn it into a seaside resort.

'Nothing left'

AFP journalists travelled to Mariupol as part of a press tour organised by the Russian army but members of the media were not allowed to approach the huge Azovstal steel plant, which has become a symbol of fierce Ukrainian resistance.

The incessant fighting of the previous weeks has died down, and the Russian army and its separatist allies now patrol the streets in the devastated city which had a population of more than half a million people before the start of the hostilities.

Elena Ilyina, who used to teach at a university in Mariupol, sobs as she tells AFP about her life, saying her apartment has been destroyed and she now lives with her daughter.

"I have nothing left," said the 55-year-old, adding that even the clothes she wears have been given to her by "sympathetic people".

Ilyina said she wants to have her old life back.

"I'd like to live in my apartment, in peace, go to work and talk to my children," she said, her voice breaking.

During the media visit, the Russian army also took the journalists to a local zoo where animals including bears and lions were kept in cages but appeared healthy.

'We adapt, we survive'

Oksana Krishtafovich, 41, used to be a cook in a local restaurant but now works at the zoo, feeding animals and milking cows.

"The restaurant where I worked was destroyed. Now they are my customers," she said, carrying a bowl to the raccoons.

She admitted that the city "lacks everything" but appeared stoic. "We adapt, we survive," she said.

Sergei Pugach, who spent 30 years working at Azovstal, one of the city's main employers, is

now a guard at the zoo.

In February, he had only two months to go before retirement. Then Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops to Ukraine.

Today Pugach does not know if he will ever receive his pension but does not complain.

"The Ukrainians are not lazy," he said, noting that as soon as the fighting stopped "people crawled out of the basements and everyone is now looking for work.

"Some are already working."

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