Putin Celebrates Russian Women Who 'Fulfill Their Duty'

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Russian President Vladimir Putin at a Kremlin reception on International Women's Day. **Mikhail Tereshchenko / TACC**

President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday praised Russian women participating in Moscow's military intervention in Ukraine at a Kremlin event marking International Women's Day.

"Now that Russia is facing direct threats to its security and sovereignty, we see many examples of bravery and determination," Putin said during the ceremony.

"In this hall there are women who fulfil their military, official and professional duties with honor," he added.

He handed out awards to women who the Kremlin determined had either distinguished themselves professionally or were mothers of large families.

A journalist working in Ukraine's southern Kherson region that is largely controlled by Russian forces and a doctor in Ukraine's eastern Luhansk region were among the recipients.

"In our country, the recognition of the merits of women working professionally is harmoniously combined with a deep understanding of the enduring importance of motherhood and traditional values," Putin said.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky praised Ukrainian women for taking a central role in defending their country against Russia's invasion in a speech to mark International Women's Day.

"I think it is important to give thanks today. To thank all the women who work, teach, study, rescue, heal, fight - fight for Ukraine," Zelensky said in a short video on social media.

It was also a day "to remember, think about and thank all women who gave their lives for our country", he added.

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On [#IWD2023](#) I honour the women that are an inspiration to us all.

The women of Ukraine.

Those who, by joining the army, smashed a glass ceiling over the head of the Russian invaders,

And those who have become unbreakable forces for good, like [@ZelenskaUA](#) [pic.twitter.com/ltGKxbkxQy](#)

— Ursula von der Leyen (@vonderleyen) [March 8, 2023](#)

Some European leaders also dedicated congratulatory messages to Ukrainian women Wednesday.

"I honor the women that are an inspiration to us all. The women of Ukraine. Those who, by joining the army, smashed a glass ceiling over the head of the Russian invaders," [tweeted](#) Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Union Commission.

International Women's Day is celebrated as a public holiday in Russia and many post-Soviet countries.

Despite its connection to the early-Soviet women's rights movement, in contemporary Russia the holiday mainly serves to reinforce traditional gender roles, with women typically receiving flowers, sweets and congratulations on their femininity.

Putin has painted himself as a defender of conservative social norms and regularly warns against "decadent" Western influence.

A presidential decree issued late last year described traditional values as "the bedrock of

Russian society, contributing to the protection and strengthening of Russia's sovereignty."

Putin also handed out two "Mother Heroine" awards, a Soviet–era decoration that he revived this year to honor women who have at least 10 children.

AFP contributed reporting.

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