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Putin Says Convicts Killed in Ukraine Paid Debt to Society

By AFP

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President Vladimir Putin on Friday said that Russian prisoners who died in Ukraine had redeemed themselves in the eyes of society.

To boost regular troops fighting in Ukraine, the army and mercenary group Wagner have extensively recruited from Russian penal colonies.

"They are dead," Putin said during a televised meeting, referring to prisoners who died in Ukraine.

"Everyone can make some mistakes, they once did. But they gave their lives for the Motherland, and fully redeemed themselves," Putin said at the meeting with servicemen who fought near Ukraine's Urozhaine on the southern front.

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After a short discussion with the soldiers, Putin observed a minute of silence to honor the prisoners who died in combat.

The Russian leader said that soldiers who fought near Urozhaine — where the Defense Ministry said a Ukrainian attack was repelled — were "an emblematic example of courage and heroism."

Convicts have reportedly been used as cannon fodder including in the eastern Ukrainian hotspot city of Bakhmut.

International experts have said that in some cases prisoners were recruited to fight in Ukraine through threats or intimidation.

Many experts and Kremlin critics say that rehabilitating and reintegrating traumatized ex-soldiers is a major challenge for Russia.

Some of the former prisoners returning from the front commit new crimes.

Russian authorities have traditionally praised patriotism and a culture of self-sacrifice, including by commemorating the Soviet victory in World War II.

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