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Kremlin Says Convicts Fighting in Ukraine Atone for Crimes 'With Blood'

By AFP

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Russian soldiers in Ukraine's partially occupied Zaporizhzhia region. **Alexei Konovalov / TASS**

Russian prisoners sent to fight in Ukraine are atoning for their crimes "with blood," the Kremlin's spokesman said Friday, answering questions about the controversial pardon of a man who brutally murdered his ex-girlfriend.

Tens of thousands of Russians convicted of violent crimes including murder and rape have been recruited to fight in Ukraine, being offered pardons and released from prison after serving on the front lines.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov defended the policy after reports said that Vladislav Kanyus, a man sentenced to 17 years in a maximum-security prison for the murder of his ex-girlfriend, was freed after fighting in Ukraine.

The case made international headlines in 2021 after it was revealed that Kanyus inflicted 111

individual injuries to his ex-partner, 23-year-old Vera Pekhteleva, in an hours-long attack described as "torture."

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"Those convicted, including for serious crimes, are atoning with blood for their crime on the battlefield," Peskov told reporters.

"They are atoning with blood in storm brigades, under bullets and under artillery fire," he added.

Russia has likely recruited some 100,000 people from prisons to fight in Ukraine, according to estimates by Olga Romanova, the head of an independent prisoners' rights group.

Local Russian media outlets have reported several instances of released prisoners going on to commit serious offenses, including murder, after finishing their military service.

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