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Aid Deliveries and Evacuations in Oleshky Begin After Demining Operation Wraps Up

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Smoke rises following an explosion during a demining operation conducted by the Russian military in the Ukrainian town of Oleshky. **Russian Defense Ministry / Reuters**

Russia and Ukraine said Friday that demining operations around the Russian-held town of Oleshky in southern Ukraine were finished and that evacuations and aid deliveries in the area could begin.

Efforts have been underway for several weeks to organize a relief operation for the town's residents, who have faced acute shortages of food and medicine. Russia seized Oleshky shortly after President Vladimir Putin ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Both sides of the conflict have praised U.S. first lady Melania Trump for helping broker the ceasefire, which is limited to the area around Oleshky, located across the Dnipro River from the Ukrainian-held city of Kherson.

"Demining operations of routes have been completed for the humanitarian mission in Oleshky," Ukraine and Russia said in virtually identical statements. "The humanitarian convoy is ready for departure."

The convoy will head to a local hospital, and residents wishing to leave will be allowed to do so within a specific time frame. Aid packages will then be delivered, the statements read.

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Ukraine's human rights chief, Dmytro Lubinets, referred to Melania Trump when he extended Kyiv's "special thanks" to someone who was "personally devoting her time and attention to the humanitarian mission and assistance to civilians in Oleshky."

Still, any hope of wider relief in the war appears to have been dashed away by a series of attacks on Ukrainian cities in recent days, including a strike on the main train station in the southeastern city of Dnipro that killed at least 15 people on Thursday.

Neither Russia nor Ukraine has reported any violations of the ceasefire in Oleshky since it began on Tuesday.

Melania Trump also confirmed in a post on X that the local pause in hostilities, expected to last until Sunday, appeared to be holding as the humanitarian operation got underway.

"The convoy is prepared to safely evacuate over 750 people who voluntarily choose to leave Oleshky. It includes 25 buses, 50 medical professionals and ambulances," she wrote.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Friday that two Russian servicemen had died while clearing mines on a road leading to Oleshky.

Reuters contributed reporting.

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