
Evacuation from Mariupol. The parish priest: "Some elderly and injured people are yet to be rescued"

Yesterday was a decisive day for the civilians trapped in the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol. At last there was progress. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was the first to announce in a televised address to the nation that approximately 100 civilians had been evacuated from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol. "Today we finally managed to start the evacuation of people from Azovstal - Zelensky said -. After many weeks of negotiations, after many attempts, various meetings, bans and proposals. There was not a day when we did not try to find a solution that would save our people. Today, for the first time since the beginning of the war, this vital corridor has begun to function. For the first time there have been two days of a real ceasefire." It was a complex and delicate operation. Women and children, including toddlers, were escorted through the rubble out of the underground passages of the steel plant and onto buses. Speaking to the BBC, Mariupol mayor Vadym Boychenko said: "The citizens who left the city say that hell exists and it's in Mariupol." Evacuations were coordinated with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations together with the army. However, the rescue operation is not simple. **"Words fail me at this moment"**, Pauline priest **Father Pavlo Tomaszewski** told SIR. He served as rector of Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish in Mariupol until the outbreak of the armed conflict. "It's a relief to know that these people have been evacuated. Yet many more are still there. Many of them are elderly persons with disabilities, wounded people, among them also soldiers. I find it hard to comment on. Because no one will help them." The government's Telegram account yesterday posted alternating messages announcing and postponing the event. Until finally this morning came the news that the evacuation of civilians from Mariupol had resumed at 7am. "There is good news - reads the Telegram message - With the support of the United Nations and the (International Committee of the) Red Cross, two additional locations have been agreed today to put people in an evacuation convoy leaving Mariupol. These are the village of Mangush and the Lunacharsky ring near Berdyansk. Whoever has family members or acquaintances there should please try to contact them and provide information concerning their eventual evacuation."

The first footage from today's rescue operation in [#Mariupol](#) has appeared. The video shows the [#Ukrainian](#) military helping people to get out of the destroyed factory. International organizations such as Red Cross and United Nations also participated in the rescue operation. pic.twitter.com/E23468kNGv

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From Rome, Pope Francis returned to call on the diplomatic community. At the Regina Coeli prayer His Holiness turned his thoughts to the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, "Mary's city", barbarically bombed and destroyed." Francis renewed his request that "safe humanitarian corridors be arranged for the people trapped in the steelworks in that city." *"I am grateful to Pope Francis because he cares about us, prays constantly for peace and never stops mentioning the Ukrainian people," says the parish priest. "Yet at the same time I realise that there is nothing else he can do!"* Diplomatic talks had begun in March between the Holy See and Moscow to stop the war in Ukraine and coordinate humanitarian corridors for the evacuation of civilians in Mariupol. But the operation failed due to Russian opposition. "I heard that Pope Francis asked Putin to allow safe humanitarian corridors for those trapped in the Azovstal steelworks, but he refused," the parish priest said. "I don't understand why the Russians won't let them out. Their refusal further evidences their real nature and that it is impossible to negotiate with them. At one point we feared that we had reached a dead end." Yesterday the Pope also mentioned terrible reports of children being expelled and deported as signs

of "a macabre regression of humanity". "This is tragically true", confirms Father Pavlo. "They are 'filtered' with Russia's security services. Then they are given a card that permits them to leave for Russia. But many of them disappear or are killed. This is horrifying." The parish priest said he had "no precise information" on how many civilians still remained in Mariupol. Interfax news agency quoted Russian television station Rossiya 24 as reporting that there could still be more than 500 civilians trapped in the Azovstal steel plant. "I understand that there are soldiers from our army, some of them wounded, and civilians. I don't know what to hope for them. I fear that this situation will drag on for a long time." **H.B. Sviatoslav Shvchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, spoke about the situation in Mariupol in his daily video-message yesterday.** The Major Archbishop said: "We are deeply saddened by what is happening in Mariupol, from where people are being rescued in different ways. But the enemy is doing all it can to transform the city into a large cemetery, creating more mass graves and abusing the local population." Last night and the day before, the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine were again under fire. Also Odessa was hit by missiles, and the city's airport was destroyed. Shelling and destruction continue in Kharkiv and Mykolaiv. The Governor of Kharkiv, Oleh Synyehubov, urged residents to remain in the shelters. "But Ukraine resists. Ukraine is fighting back. Ukraine is praying," Shevchuk said. " More importantly, the Ukrainian army is gradually liberating our land from the Russian occupier."

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