

Russia and Ukraine exchange hundreds of prisoners in UAE-Brokered deal



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In a significant development, Russia and Ukraine have conducted a large-scale prisoner exchange facilitated by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The swap involved 150 Ukrainian soldiers held by

Russia and an equal number of Russian troops in Ukrainian custody.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced the return of 189 Ukrainians, including defenders from the Azovstal steel plant, Mariupol, Chernobyl nuclear power plant, and Snake Island. Zelensky emphasized Ukraine's unwavering commitment to securing the release of all captives, stating, "We are working to free everyone from Russian captivity. We do not forget anyone."

The exchange highlights key battlegrounds of the conflict. Mariupol fell to Russian forces in May 2022 after a prolonged siege, with Azovstal's defenders becoming symbols of resistance.

Chernobyl, initially seized during the February 2022 invasion, was later returned to Ukrainian control. Snake Island, another flashpoint, saw Ukrainian prisoners swapped for Russian captives earlier in the war.

Russia's defense ministry confirmed that released Russian soldiers had returned to Belarus for medical care and family contact. Human rights commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova expressed relief, noting the soldiers would celebrate the New Year on home soil.

This marks the 11th prisoner exchange this year, a notably lower frequency compared to earlier stages of the war. Ukraine reports that over 3,950 captives have been freed since the conflict began, though ongoing battles complicate negotiations. Estimates suggest Russia holds over 8,000

Ukrainian prisoners, raising concerns about increasing captivity amid Moscow's battlefield advances.

The swap underscores the human cost of the war and ongoing efforts to address its humanitarian toll.