

A press release from the Baptist World Alliance concerning Baptists in Ukraine

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION AND ONGOING MINISTRY

Since 2014, portions of eastern Ukraine have been ravaged by political and military conflict, and the already occupied territories have faced increasing persecution and hardship.

In the Luhansk Occupied Territory, the Ukrainian Baptist churches were officially declared a terrorist organization, therefore requiring all of the churches to close. The Baptist hymnal and the Gospel of John were outlawed as 'extremist material.' The churches that have tried to remain open have done so at great risk and in secret.

Before the present invasion, despite persecution and the daily hardship of life in an area of conflict, 25 Baptist churches have been established in the Gray Zone (the borders of the occupied territories) in the last five years. Over the last six years, the Baptist union in Ukraine has invested more than \$54,350,000 Ukrainian Hryvnia (equates to over \$2 million USD) into the Gray Zone for aid, relief, and community development. Pastors who have fled from the occupied territories and resettled elsewhere in Ukraine, including in Kyiv and Lviv, have started ten new churches.

Today the All-Ukrainian Union of Associations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists is the second largest Baptist community in Europe and the Middle East and is also the largest Protestant group in Ukraine with over 100,000 members across more than 2,100 churches. They have been a member body of the BWA for 30 years as has the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS

On February 24, the challenges that have been the daily reality of those in the Gray Zone became the reality of all Ukrainians when they woke to the sounds of sirens and falling artillery as Russian military launched a full-scale invasion by land, air, and sea. Within hours, the European Baptist Federation organized a global solidarity call to hear directly from Baptist leaders in Ukraine. Attended by more than 75 Baptist leaders around the world, the global Baptist community pledged support and prayers as Ukrainian Baptist leader Igor Bandura emotionally described the short-term and anticipated long-term impact of the attacks.

Baptist churches in the westernmost region of Ukraine have established their buildings as “Centers of Hope” to provide food and shelter for the displaced. Hungarian Baptists have set up a humanitarian aid center from which they are distributing food and hygiene kits and providing basic medical care. Baptists in Poland are already welcoming refugees into their homes and churches as well as the Warsaw Baptist Theological Seminary.



Ukrainian refugees who have fled into Poland take shelter in Warsaw at the Warsaw Baptist Theological Seminary.

Baptist aid workers report that women and children have been forced to say goodbye along the borders of some neighboring countries due to restrictions barring men age 18-60 from crossing.

A prayer guide and additional resources are available at <https://www.baptistworld.org/prayforpeace/>

An extended version of this report can be found at <https://www.baptistworld.org/baptist-world-alliance-responds-to-crisis-in-ukraine/>