

Ukraine Baptists displaced, yet aid victims of conflict

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Ukrainian Baptists report that about 5,500 of their members have been displaced from their homes. They are among the 100,000 people displaced as a result of conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Thousands of people are wounded, and some have died.

A letter from the All-Ukrainian Union of Associations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists to the Baptist World Alliance said that churches and church-related health-care centers are providing aid to the displaced and wounded.

“In these difficult circumstances, we are called to enhance the ministry for the sake of victory over evil and in every possible way, to help stop the war,” the union wrote.

Though there was a truce between pro-Russian militias and the Ukrainian army, fighting has destroyed bridges, supply lines, apartments, vehicles, and more.

An e-mail BWA received in early October, from an author unnamed for safety reasons, reported that “bloody confrontations leading to more deaths continue.”

Amid shelling and “tanks moving through the streets,” Christians “hold prayer meetings in the city parks and squares, establish centers of free psychological and medical assistance, host, feed, and dress the refugees.”

In early October, Ukraine’s parliament—whose speaker and chair, Oleksandr Turchynov, is a Baptist elder—hosted a meeting with church association leaders.

“Turchynov declared that the restoration of Ukraine is impossible without the restoration of people’s trust in government,” the author of the e-mail wrote, referring to special parliamentary elections in late October.

In July the head of the Ukrainian Baptist Union joined other Christian leaders in a statement reporting mistreatment and murder of pastors and ministers and the confiscation of churches. Protestants in Ukraine make up less than 1 percent of the population.

“The purposeful attacks of armed militants against evangelicals are accompanied by abductions, beatings, torture, threats of execution, pogroms at the places of prayer meetings, [and] captures of prayer houses, rehabilitation centers, and other places of worship,” they wrote in the statement.

The *Baptist Times* in the United Kingdom reported in July “the killing of four Baptists who were dragged out of their church in Slavyansk in June and whose bodies were found in a mass grave earlier this month.”

Igor Bandura, vice president of the Ukrainian Baptist Union, addressed the Baptist World Alliance Annual Gathering in Izmir, Turkey, in July. He noted that Ukraine had 21 years of peace between independence from the Soviet Union and protests beginning in November 2013, when the government lessened its economic ties to the European Union in favor of closer connections to Russia.

“When the conflicts started, the first thing the churches did was we started to pray more,” he said, “begging God for help, for peace, for reconciliation.” —Baptist World Alliance