



CHRISTIAN OUTLOOK

- The Baptist Union of Ukraine -



## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM in the Occupied Territories of Eastern Ukraine

The militants are continuing to actively leverage heavy equipment and weapons in eastern Ukraine. There are up to 30 shells from the occupied territory each day, with people taken captive, wounded or killed almost daily. The Russian Federation has amassed about 77,000 troops, about one thousand tanks and four thousand pieces of other military equipment along the Ukrainian border. The threat of invasion is constant. The main goal for many people remaining in the Donbass region is to feed themselves and survive during the cold.

Up to 100 Baptist churches are forced to survive under conditions of occupation and oppression. Currently, there are 40 Baptist churches in the occupied territories of the Lugansk region and 43 in Donetsk, with a total of 4,763 members. Six churches in the conflict zone do not have a pastor. The situation for religious communities is alarming and unstable. Key human rights are violated, freedom of religion is limited and the existence of religious groups there is threatened.

Most local churches do not risk conducting meetings at prayer houses; therefore they have begun to gather in the countryside, in courtyards and in small groups in homes.

# CORRESPONDENCE from ministers of the occupied territories:

- Brother, Shalom! How did Sunday go in your region? Did something happen at church?
- Everything was silent. We met in the forest.
- Thank you.



- At first we were joining the churches who have religious buildings. But now we are shifting to home groups.

This Sunday we will go with the church on a hike. Everyone in sports clothes. We will hold the service in nature.

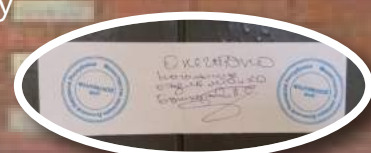
Then everyone will be with fishing rods, pretend we are fishing... And so on.

We were meeting with brothers at their flats, but this option is no longer available. The authorities are visiting neighbors, searching, asking questions.

## The EFFECTS of the newly introduced law

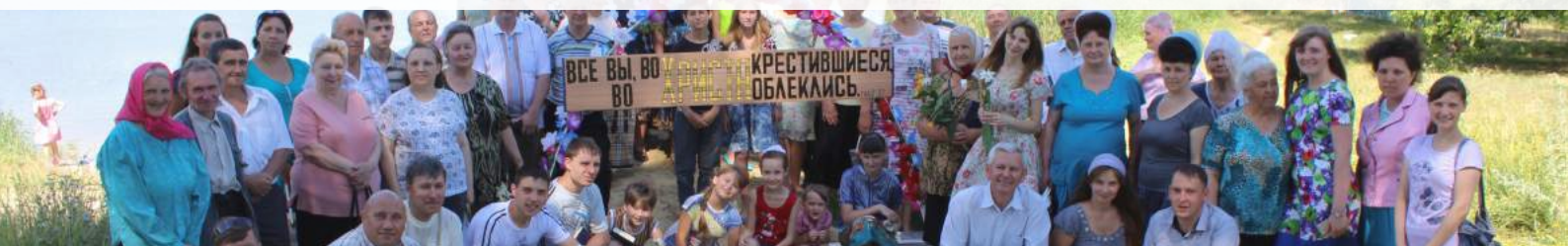
According to the law introduced this year by the self-proclaimed Lugansk People's Republic (No. 211-II "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" dated February 2, 2018), the churches are obligated to go through the procedure of registration or legalization in the so-called Lugansk People's Republic within six months. If this obligation is not fulfilled, a religious organization is deemed to have ceased its activities in the LPR territory.

However, none of the churches that provided documents for re-registration in "LPR" actually received registration. At the same time, religious activity among churches in the housing sector was banned, while a number of church buildings still existed with private individual ownership.





According to this law, the existence of unregistered churches and religious groups without the status of a legal entity must cease.



However, in August, changes were introduced to the Law on Registration of Churches of "LPR" that extended the registration deadline to October 15, 2018, thereby providing an additional one and a half months. We believe this was a result of the prayers of Baptists and intercession around the world, with the help of international intervention and influence on religious freedom in "LPR". We pray that this law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" in the occupied territories will be repealed as such.



## Baptists declared **EXTREMISTS**

On July 26, 2018, on their official website the so-called "Ministry of LPR State Security" declared the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of the ECB "an extremist organization." The next day a number of online media critically reacted to this information.

[https://lb.ua/society/2018/07/27/403780\\_Inr\\_obyavili\\_baptistov.html](https://lb.ua/society/2018/07/27/403780_Inr_obyavili_baptistov.html)

[https://censor.net.ua/news/3078568/v\\_Inr\\_obyavili\\_baptistov\\_ekstremistskoyi\\_organizatsieyi](https://censor.net.ua/news/3078568/v_Inr_obyavili_baptistov_ekstremistskoyi_organizatsieyi)

Therefore, the leadership of the ECB immediately informed local churches of this and invited everyone to pray and intercede for our brothers and sisters that face persecution and hostility.





# Voice of the church in occupation

**Because of religious freedom restrictions** in "LPR," Evangelical Christian-Baptist communities in the village of Nagolno-Tarasivka and the city of Rovenky in the Lugansk region were forced to stop conducting worship services. Believers have been accused of "unauthorized public gatherings and public events among the population," so they were banned from meeting together and fined. Pastor Vasily Logvinenko was brought to administrative punishment.

**The church in Molodogvardiysk** was forced to stop worshipping in the summer of 2018.

On June 3, during the Sunday worship meeting at the church's apartment with 35 people present, five armed men in civilian clothes and balaclavas broke in and presented themselves as Ministry of LPR State Security employees. They stopped the meeting, demanding explanations and documents permitting worship. They searched the area and removed literature and the church's technical equipment. All the attendees were required to provide personal information (address and phone number). After that most people were released. However, they required the responsible brother, Sergei Zharkov, and four others who had their passports with them to stay for protocol drafting.



Afterwards, the apartment was sealed. Then they went to the house used by the church to rehabilitate alcohol and drug addicts. There they also searched and removed literature, medications and a computer hard drive. The house and all utility rooms there were also sealed.

Sergei Zharkov was summoned to the police the next day and brutally interrogated about the community's activities: they blindfolded him and moved him to an unknown place. A search was carried out in his home after that, and they removed the hard drive from his brother's computer, literature and his personal phone. A few days later the district police officer informed the responsible brother that a case under the article "On violation of the law on holding religious gatherings" was opened against him. Confiscated items have not been returned to this day, and rooms remain sealed.

**A robbery was committed** in the prayer house in the Kadyivka church. And this is not the only case of such crimes in the region. Also in the town of Stakhanov a group of armed men in camouflage clothes arrived at the prayer house in two cars. They broke into the build-

ing when nobody was there and began to plunder the church property. At about 11 p.m., two more trucks were brought to the house and all the property, literature, church benches, Communion items, office and lighting equipment, heating radiators and the boiler of the heating system, even the floor covering and curtains, were taken out. Bare walls were left. The occupation authorities have not reacted to this incident.



**On June 9 there was** another incident. The medical equipment of Christian doctors was removed and their charitable work was terminated. Christian doctors who live and work in the occupied territory of the Lugansk region have united for regular charity ministry to local people. Examinations and medical care for people was carried out on the territory of the local Baptist churches. This incident occurred in the town of Gorodische. The medical team consisted of four doctors: a therapist, a neuropathologist, an ophthalmologist, a urologist (he was conducting an ultrasound diagnosis)

and two volunteer students. A group of armed men (two of them had masks) broke into the premises after dinner. They roughly stopped the admission process and forced patients to leave. After interrogating the team, they took an ophthalmic diagnostic kit, a cardiograph, an ultrasound examination device and other equipment. So the ministry of doctors was forcibly stopped.

**In temporarily occupied Alchevsk,** pro-Russian mercenaries detained pastors of the Good News Church during worship. With no explanations, the ministers were taken to the premises of the so-called "Ministry of LPR State Security" on August 7, 2018.

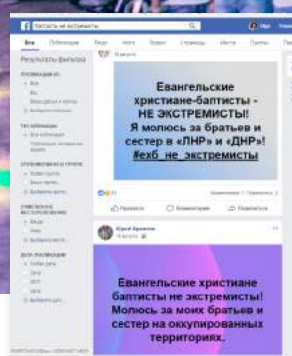
Unfortunately, there are many more cases like these.





# “Baptists are not extremists” – Christian youth of Ukraine flash mob

On August 13-18, during the fourteenth Christian Youth of Ukraine congress, pastor Igor Bandura organized public prayer of three thousand young people on their knees for the Lugansk and Donetsk regions. At the end of the prayer, the youth instantly launched a flash mob on Facebook: “Baptists are not extremists. I am fighting for my brothers and sisters at LPR and DPR!”



**Baptist  
World  
Alliance**  
Resolutions Adopted by the BWA General Council  
Zurich, Switzerland  
July 2-6, 2018

## The text of **RESOLUTION** in Zurich

The Baptist Union of Ukraine is constantly working on forming public opinion and creating international pressure and influence on the violations of religious freedom in the occupied regions. Several visits were made to International Radio Liberty and to Gromadske (Public) Radio for this reason. These are trustworthy sources. Programs were aired with Igor Bandura (First Vice-President of the AUC ECB) participating: “How Protestants are oppressed in the occupied territories” and “Attack on Protestants in Lugansk: pastor was ‘fined’, the church was sealed” and others. As a result, Radio Liberty has extended the call to the international community to guarantee protection to civilians. (<https://www.bwanet.org/resources/bwa-current-resolutions>)

<https://hromadskeradio.org/programs/kyiv-donbas/yak-na-okupovanyh-terytoriyah-tysnut-na-protestantiv>  
<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/donbass-realii/29410439.html>



# Humanitarian cargo to eastern Ukraine

One more humanitarian project was begun in the summer of 2018, implemented in conjunction with European Baptist Federation churches. Five trucks delivered about 90 tons of cargo to eastern Ukraine. This time almost 20 thousand children and adults were able to get food and hygiene packages.



This fall, we plan to continue the project to help people have heat in the winter. Because of severe climatic conditions and lack of access to energy resources due to high prices, this will be the third time in a row we are organizing such a humanitarian "winterization" project for needy people.

This aid is provided to the neediest people, who have become hostages of the war in eastern Ukraine. They are the disabled, large families, elderly people and IDPs (internally-displaced persons).



The aid covers the gray zone to a greater extent and goes beyond material support and the provision of necessary goods. Sadly, premature deaths from stress, strokes and heart attacks are common in these areas. Therefore, words of support, consolation and encouragement from believers, volunteers and ministers with open and sensitive hearts are becoming an invaluable aid. All this gives people hope and the opportunity to learn about a different perspective – peace and joy in Jesus Christ. But the main thing is to receive eternal life, which we gain only by trusting in Him as our own Lord and Savior.



# Thanksgiving celebrations in Kyiv

The All-Ukrainian thanksgiving celebrations will be held in the center of Kyiv on September 23, 2018. Despite all the turmoil and difficulties, we are even more aware of God's presence and His sovereign power over the nations. Therefore, we are gathering to express our deep gratitude and to testify to this fact: we believe in a better future and the hope we have that He has given us comfort and joy. Therefore, on September 23, we will proclaim God's grace and thank Him for His blessings and opportunities. We will also ask the Lord for His kindness and peace for our country.



The first time we celebrated the National Thanksgiving Day in Ukraine was September 17, 2017. Two hundred thousand Ukrainians from every corner of our country gathered on the central square of our capital at that time. Protestants were celebrating this special occasion from early morning to late in the evening. Unique expositions, master classes, and music of famous performers were presented there. All of that became a positive testimony and experience, which this year will also point to the One to whom all gratitude and respect should be given.

We use this invaluable opportunity to spread the Kingdom of God in Ukraine. Through the National Thanksgiving Day, we declare the need to bring proper thanksgiving and worthy worship to the One from whom everything comes, through whom we have everything we need, and to whom we must give everything back. We are aware of our responsibility to preach the Gospel in our country and to motivate Ukrainians to be grateful to God in times of war and in times of peace. Such large-scale public events provide a good opportunity to shape public opinion about evangelical churches.

Reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Donbas can be also found at <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?query=&religion=all&country=87>

ALL-UKRAINIAN UNION OF CHURCHES OF  
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS – BAPTISTS



[www.baptyst.com](http://www.baptyst.com)

Pray for UKRAINE

