

EASTERN UKRAINE: Armed Russia-backed militants attack Baptist house of prayer

RISU (27.09.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2NPRHZk> – A group of armed militants from the self-proclaimed 'Luhansk people's republic' [LPR] have seized an Evangelical Baptist House of Prayer in Brianka and driven out the believers, turning the whole place upside down. According to the Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Baptist Christians, these representatives of the Russian-backed 'republic' left only after it was made clear to them that the building was the private property of one of the believers.

Petro Dudnyk, Pastor of the Good News Evangelical Church in Sloviansk and a tireless volunteer from the beginning of the military conflict, reports that the Church in Brianka handed out water and food to hundreds of people in need during the most critical times during the past four years. He says that the Church has continued up till now to take in and provide refuge to all those in need, regardless of their religious affiliation and ethnic origin. Informs website of the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group.

This is not the first such armed raid and / or seizure of churches in areas until Kremlin-backed militant control. On 6 July this year, Alexander Moseychuk, Pastor of the New Life Church in Makiyivka reported that seven representatives of the so-called 'Donetsk people's republic' [DPR], some of them armed had burst into the church, announced that it no longer

belonged to and announced that it was being taken over. There are around 120 believers whose church has been taken from them. Pastor Alexander also stressed that the New Life Church had helped over 700 people in need since the beginning of the war. According to the Institute for Religious Freedom, there were similar moves on 10 June in Donetsk, with the Church of the Holy Spirit in Donetsk, which is under the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, forcibly closed by people from the so-called 'DPR state property fund'. On 27 March 2018, men in military gear turned up at a Baptist place of worship in Stakhanov [within 'LPR'], forced their way into the premises and took out everything, including furniture and items used during services.

The situation varies somewhat in the two Kremlin-controlled 'republics', however both demonstrate the same basic intolerance for all faiths, except the Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate.

In 'DPR', for example, a new ruling, following from the so-called 'law on freedom of faith and religious organizations', in force since May 2018, prohibits the activities of any religious organization that has not undergone 're-registration' by 1 March 2019. Believers report that their churches or religious organizations have been told that if they don't re-register, they will face a ban on their religious activities and 'confiscation' of all their property.

Since an 'expert assessment' is required in order to obtain such 're-registration', it is likely that this will be used as an opportunity to ban some churches. As was to be expected after the past four years, the Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate will not have to go through any of this,

and will instead have a simplified 'legalization' process.

Both 'DPR' and 'LPR' are directly following Russia in repressive measures against the Jehovah's Witnesses. 'DPR' recently banned almost all Jehovah's Witness material, claiming it to be 'extremist', while in February 'LPR' banned the Jehovah's Witnesses and other 'non-traditional' faiths. This was after they passed several 'laws', including one aimed at hunting down and prohibiting so-called extremism in religious or political organizations, as well as in the media.

On 28 August 2017, they claimed that the Jehovah's Witnesses were helping Ukraine's Security Service [SBU] and "neo-Nazi groups". An investigative search had supposedly established not only that the Jehovah's Witnesses in Luhansk and Alchevsk were in breach of 'LPR law', but that they were probably "agents of influence of the Ukrainian Security Service.

The militants do not only target Christian churches. As reported, the only mosque remaining in occupied Donetsk was closed in late June, after an armed search and interrogation of the Imam and worshippers. The so-called 'DPR law' on countering extremist activities was cited as the grounds.

Churches under the Moscow Patriarchate have enjoyed special treatment from the beginning, with religious persecution of all other faiths becoming a grave problem from the beginning of the Russian-backed, manned and armed military conflict in April 2014.

A 2015 study by human rights groups entitled 'When God becomes the weapon' identified systematic and widespread religious persecution, and reported that religion was one of the key motivating factors and justification cited for criminal activities by unlawful paramilitary groups within the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics'

A major role had been played by unlawful armed groups who "under the banners of the Russian Orthodox Army and the Cossack Army, openly manifest their adherence to orthodoxy and have begun a 'crusade' across the Donbas region".

The supposed 'Russian World', which the militants see themselves as defending, has been endorsed by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill.

It is quite likely that the situation will deteriorate further following the aggressive reaction shown by the Moscow Patriarchate and Russia to the decision by the Universal Patriarchate in Constantinople to grant autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Kyiv Patriarchate.

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Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon President Poroshenko to pay the pensions of retired people in Eastern Ukraine

A call for help from Dr Borys Kondorskii

HRWF (29.08.2018) – Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon President Poroshenko to urgently pay the pensions of retired people living in Ukraine’s ‘uncontrolled territories’. The situation of retired people in general in the whole of Ukraine is absolutely dramatic. Professors, teachers, medical doctors and other Ukrainians who have worked for state institutions since the independence receive less than USD 100 per month...

A call for help and social justice from Dr Borys Kondorskii

Ukraine is currently the country where all human rights in all spheres of life are being violated. It especially concerns those citizens of Ukraine who reside in so-called uncontrolled

territories. Getting your retirement pension is one of the fundamental human rights since a retiree has no other maintenance.

Already since 2014 receiving retirement pension by those citizens of Ukraine who reside in the territories of not recognized DPR and LPR has been subject to a whole series of requirements and conditions that were disrespectful to human dignity. One had to regularly draw up different documents, the requirements to which were constantly being changed. Degrading check-ups were a regular thing.

Since May 2018 Pension Fund of Ukraine has completely stopped paying retirement pensions to the majority of the citizens of Donbass. Kyiv Appeal Administrative Court declared these actions illegal. Yet both Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Pension Fund have constantly been ignoring the decision of the court.

It is worth noting that the average retirement pension in Ukraine is equal to 100 US dollars. Ukraine has been in the state of permanent economic and political crisis during the whole period of its independence. During this time Ukraine's take in the world industrial production has reduced in more than 50 times. All of this results in the critical shortage of budget funds.

Who is Dr Borys Kondorskii?

Some time ago, our organization received a first email from Dr Kondorskii saying:

As an independent researcher I am working in the field of theoretical problems of history, politology, biological and

language evolutions. More than 50 scientific papers of mine have been published for the recent 5 years. One can familiarize oneself with my articles on the website ResearchGate. I am currently developing a theory of a revolutionary period which has a high prognostic potential. I have predicted a real possibility of the occurrence of state formation on the basis of an idea of a “caliphate” as well as the nature of further development of the events in Syria already in May, 2014 at the XIIIth International Conference of Africanists in Moscow.

Before this May I received 100\$ of my retirement pension and 70\$ of social securities from local authorities. I lived off this money, worked on my articles and went to scientific conferences at my own expense. I participated in 4 conferences in person in 2017 as well as in 8 conferences in absence. Now Ukrainian government has deprived me of my retirement pension only on the ground of the fact that I reside in Donetsk, as well as thousands of other retirees who live on the territories of self-proclaimed DPR and LPR. This is a major violation of the constitution of the country, international human rights treaties which have been signed by Ukraine, as well as Minsk accords.

I believe that your organization, holding true to the ideals of human rights, should rise the question of lawlessness of the actions of Ukrainian government in terms of human rights violation.

Dr Borys Kondorskii

HRWF thinks that beyond his personal case, it is important to highlight the dramatic situation of all pensioners in Ukraine.

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UKRAINE: Interference with worship continues in eastern regions of Ukraine

JW.ORG (13.12.16) – <http://bit.ly/2icsCbk> – People living in the eastern regions of Ukraine daily confront situations that disrupt their lives and foster uncertainty and fear. The conflict in the region also brings a heightened sense of anxiety to Jehovah’s Witnesses. It is not only the prevailing insecurity but also the religious discrimination that is alarming. Armed men have seized control of some of the Witnesses’ Kingdom Halls (houses of worship). They have told the Witnesses that the Orthodox religion is the only approved religion and that they intend to “uproot Jehovah’s Witnesses” from the eastern regions of Ukraine.

Seizures of Kingdom Halls

Between June 2014 and November 2016, groups of armed men have forcibly seized 18 Kingdom Halls, either for use as barracks

or for other uses to support their cause. While most of these seizures of property took place when the conflict was growing in 2014, Kingdom Halls have also been seized recently.

A September 15, 2016, report issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights observed that after more than two years of conflict, the situation in the east of Ukraine remains volatile. The report states: "Those living in areas controlled by the armed groups are subject to arbitrary rule and various human rights abuses." The abuses suffered by Jehovah's Witnesses in the region include abductions, harassment, and beatings. They and their neighbors have also suffered material loss, as noted in the report: "Armed groups continued to loot and use civilian homes and other property for military purpose[s]."

On the morning of July 22, 2016, a group of Witnesses in Horlivka were gathered for worship in the Kingdom Hall at 105-A Vitchyzniana Street when armed men entered the building and ordered everyone to leave immediately. The men ransacked the building and removed all of the furniture and equipment. This same building had been seized on November 29, 2014, but was soon abandoned. The Witnesses had resumed using their house of worship for religious meetings until it was seized again, on July 22.

Three days later, armed men entered another Kingdom Hall in Horlivka, located at 9 Simferopolska Street. The men took everything from the building, even the radiators, and removed the exterior fence. The congregations that formerly met at the building have had to make other arrangements to gather for worship.

Persisting in Meeting Together for Worship

Some congregations that were forced out of their Kingdom Hall meet for worship in small groups to avoid undue attention from armed groups. Other Witnesses travel to Kingdom Halls outside

the conflict zone for their religious meetings, coping with poor transportation and additional expense. Those who cannot travel because of age or poor health listen to their religious meetings by telephone.

The effort required to gather together is compounded by the hostilities and other hardships. Illia Kobel, a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses in Ukraine, stated: "Like their neighbors, Witnesses living close to the buffer zone are emotionally exhausted because of the frequent shootings and explosions. They face economic difficulties caused by rising prices and low income. Despite the challenges, the Witnesses persist in meeting together for worship with fellow believers."

The Witnesses Return to Some Kingdom Halls

Jehovah's Witnesses are grateful that they can once again use six of the seized buildings as places of worship. Although the buildings suffered damage, local Witnesses worked together to repair them to make them suitable for religious meetings. A seventh building was so severely damaged that it is not yet usable.

A congregation forced from its Kingdom Hall in the Luhansk region in September 2014 was able to worship in the building again about a year later. An elder in the congregation, Anatoliy Danko, expressed the feelings of many when he said: "At moments like this, we appreciate that our congregation is our family. After a long separation, we came back to our home."

Eleven buildings remain in the control of armed men. To see a revised list of the Kingdom Halls that have been seized, please click on the link below.

[Kingdom Halls Seized](#)

Neutrality Amid Conflict

- Jehovah's Witnesses are known worldwide for their political neutrality—they do not take sides in any conflict. Witnesses living in the eastern regions of Ukraine are no different. They look forward to the time when they can live peacefully with their families and neighbors and freely practice their religion without hindrance.....

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