

In the news this past week (23-30 July 2020):

COMPREHENSIVE CEASEFIRE TAKES EFFECT IN EMBATTLED EASTERN UKRAINE

Separatist groups in eastern Ukraine and Ukrainian's military agreed to a full and comprehensive ceasefire beginning on Monday 27 July, to try to end hostilities in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. Since the start of the conflict in 2014, there have been several attempts to halt the violent clashes, but none of these have been upheld. The most recent ceasefire agreement was signed following talks between Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy and Russian president Vladimir Putin, along with input from the Organisation for Security and



Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). However, Ukrainian troops have accused separatist groups of breaking the ceasefire hours after it was set to begin. The Kremlin has encouraged Ukraine to pursue talks directly with separatist leaders, saying it cannot guarantee adherence to the ceasefire agreement. Russia has consistently denied its funding and support of the pro-Russia separatist groups; however, it is widely believed that the separatist groups are largely backed by Russia. Talks held between France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine have focused on the withdrawal of heavy weaponry, the restoration of Ukraine's border controls, the holding of local elections, and wider autonomy for Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Mr Zelenskiy's promise to end the long-running conflict was a focal point of his election campaign last year.

From a Christian perspective, an INcontext contact in Ukraine, explains that despite the varying political opinions on the conflict, the Church has been able to accomplish much in the region. From hosting refugees fleeing the warzone, to distributing humanitarian aid to affected areas, Christians in Ukraine continue to assist people on both sides of the conflict line. More churches have been planted in the conflict zone of Donbas than in any other region in Ukraine since the start of the conflict, with foreign congregations providing vital support to local evangelical churches. Historically, the Orthodox Church in Ukraine has been anti-evangelical, making it difficult at times for protestant Christians to spread the Gospel, but the war has opened new opportunities for churches to be planted, and to flourish within the hostile environment.

Pray with us for the following:

- For churches to remain focused on strengthening existing churches and planting new ones in Donbas as there are still many unreached villages
- For churches elsewhere in the country to remain sensitive to the needs of churches and people in Donbas
- For the leaders of the new church plants in Donbas to receive support and that they will remain committed and envisioned

Image: REUTERS/Ukrainian Defence Ministry