

Report of Conversation on 18th May between Brenda Fraser and Alan Reid and Istvan Olah from Debrecen

Istvan explained that Hungary used to be a much bigger country but after the First World War when borders were redrawn, parts of what used to be Hungary became part of Ukraine and of Romania and there are still significant Hungarian-speaking minorities in parts of Western Ukraine and North-western Romania, mostly members of Reformed Churches.

He told us that the Hungarian-speaking people in Ukraine are not allowed to use the Hungarian language for official purposes so the children are educated in Ukrainian and all official business must be conducted in Ukrainian.

Csongor (or Chomonyn to give it its Ukrainian name) is near Nagydobrony (Velyka Dobron in Ukrainian) which is a community about the size of Kinross (6,000). The Reformed Church has a Sunday attendance of about 130 so not dissimilar to KPC and they are hosting 35 refugees, most of whom are children. They are providing two meals a day for them and also activities. One of the refugees is a Baptist minister so he is leading services for them in Ukrainian.

Schools across Ukraine are closed because the authorities don't want to run the risk of a missile strike destroying the future of a community in one go. All education is online with all the associated drawbacks of that.

There is not much traffic at the Border now, and some of the 1 million refugees in Western Ukraine have actually started returning to their homes in places from which the Russians have now withdrawn. Hungary is not allowing armaments to be transported from NATO into Ukraine through their territory because they don't want the Hungarian-speaking minority in Ukraine to become a target for Russian missiles. The railway line from Romania into Ukraine used to have no more than 4 trains a day - now there are 10 and more every day, all carrying arms.

Food supplies are low, particularly in the towns - in the villages and rural areas food is produced so things are not so bad. Petrol is in short supply and customers are rationed to 10 litres at a time. The Great Church is sending a van load of food every week. In Eastern Ukraine, where the fighting is going on, the fields are not being cultivated so there will be further food shortages later in the year and, as we have been hearing in our own media there will be global shortages because of the fact that previously Ukraine supplied huge quantities of grain and cooking oil to the wider world.

Work is starting on the property in Csongor with a view to housing up to four families. They are hopeful that they will be able to attract a doctor to come to Csongor as a result of being able to offer accommodation because there is currently no doctor in the village.

Istvan spoke about how unbelievable it is to him that such a situation is happening a matter of miles from Debrecen. They ask us to continue in prayer for all involved and for a speedy end to the conflict.