



Appeal by Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili

Humanitarian Support to Georgia

Dear Friends of Georgia

My homeland is being invaded by the Russians once again. As I write this message villages and towns in central Georgia are being plundered by mercenaries, people killed, girls and women raped. All of us feel humiliated and devastated. The war in Georgia is leaving thousands of people without shelter, food and medicine. Several hundreds of people have been killed, thousands are injured and wounded, and hundreds of women have been raped and abused... It has been estimated that there are already around 100.000 internally displaced people. A humanitarian disaster is inevitable. Something has to be done. The British Ambassador to Georgia has spoken about a “pending humanitarian catastrophe”. Bearing in mind Georgia’s fragile economy we can tell you that the diplomat is not exaggerating the situation. The coming winter will be fatal for many people.

The Betheli Humanitarian Association in Georgia, a charity founded by the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia ten years ago, is helping people in need. It was founded as a result of the Church’s work among the Chechen refugees and then developed into a well-organized local humanitarian organization running various social projects, including a home for the elderly and outreach to the homeless and destitute, refugees, street children and single mothers.

The Betheli Humanitarian Association has branches in all parts of Georgia and is able to reach out to all those who have suffered the tragic consequences of the war in Georgia.

Our church people are already heavily involved in relief work. The Betheli Center in Tbilisi has already started sheltering children and mothers from the conflict zones. The

staff and volunteers are involved in the distribution of food, medicine and water. All the Church resources have been diverted into the humanitarian work. Even the funds raised for the Feast of the Transfiguration, which falls on August 19, have been diverted to the internally displaced people, the injured, refugees and prisoners of war. Unfortunately, the Church's resources are extremely limited, while the need is huge and urgent.

What is needed?

There are three stages for humanitarian aid:

- a. Most urgent: shelter, food, water, medicine.
- b. Very Urgent: medical and psychological assistance, counseling.
- c. Urgent: blankets, clothes and fuel for the winter.

How can you help?

We need financial contributions, so that we can buy these goods from within Georgia if they are still available, or otherwise from neighboring Turkey, making the best use of the money received.

How to make donations?

The funds should be transferred to the Church account in Germany:

Account Nr. 11474 47, at Spar- und Kreditbank EFG eG, Bad Homburg, Germany.

IBAN: DE95 5009 2100 0001 1474 47

BIC: GENODE51BH2

Beneficiary: Bund EFG w/Union of Georgia
Scheidemannstrasse 14
89518 Heidenheim
Germany

(For transfers in US dollars we can supply you with additional information).

How will you know that your money is wisely spent?

We have an extremely good team of people who have been instrumental in implementing humanitarian and social projects for many years. We also have the Order of St. Nino, made up of doctors, nurses and volunteers who have been looking after 400 people even before the war.

The Betheli Humanitarian Association can guarantee full accountability about any contribution made to help the country of Georgia.

Please pray

I would also like to ask you to join me in prayer for peace in Georgia and for reconciliation between the warring sides. Last Monday was the darkest day in my life. As I was receiving dozens of devastating messages, both by mobile and internet, I lost the ability to see the power of the Gospel. I knew it was still there but I could not see and communicate it to others. For the first time in my ministry I failed to say to the people: "Do not be afraid!" In my mental torment I saw a vision that helped me to forgive the enemy and to mentally embrace the arch-enemy of the country. Obviously this experience did not make him less evil, but it did liberate me from anger and hatred.

What I am saying here might be over-emotive and too personal. Perhaps I should not be writing it in fear of antagonizing those who are on my side. But I felt I had to be truthful with you even if the truthfulness makes you vulnerable.

Instead the final word

Almost ten years ago we helped Chechen refugees who had come to Georgia after the second Chechen-Russian war. For the last ten years I thought that I did understand their pain now. It is only now I start to realize that I could not. It is very different when something similar is happening with you. After the present crisis I understand them better. You feel differently when something of that nature happens with you, when you lose everything and having nowhere to turn. When you see and hear tanks rolling to your city. The city of your childhood and youth. I do understand Chechens now but I pray that you will never understand fully what all these things mean. I pray that you never experience the pain of powerlessness and helplessness in front of the brutal forces.

The main thing that I have learned through the present humiliation is the following: The crucifixion is always, always, always followed by the resurrection.

+ Archbishop Malkhaz

11th August 2008