



April 12, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jeffries:

I write to you as the president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). Our organization serves as the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The SBC is the nation's largest Protestant denomination, with over 47,000 churches and over 13 million members. I am writing to share the concerns of our convention in continuing to support the people of Ukraine in their struggles to protect their national sovereignty.

In September of 2022, President Putin issued a "partial mobilization order" and significantly escalated Russia's already brutal invasion of the sovereign state of Ukraine. The response from the United States was swift: Secretary Blinken stated at a United Nations Security Council meeting that "the very international order we've gathered here to uphold is being shredded before our eyes." The U.S. rightly demanded that Russia be held accountable and [promised](#) "unwavering support" for Ukraine's fight against this unprovoked and unjust war.

Since then, the people of Ukraine have faced violence, the [kidnapping](#) of their children to Russia, and vast misinformation campaigns conducted by their assailants. Furthermore, our Ukrainian Christian brothers and sisters have been intensely persecuted in Russian-controlled territories as a direct result of their faith. Our [fellow Baptists](#) have faced particularly intense persecution and have had over [400 churches](#) destroyed by Russian attacks. Some of our Ukrainian Baptist brothers, along with former ERLC president, Dr. Richard Land, and Daniel Darling of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary [wrote](#) to you earlier this week urging the consideration of the plight of Ukrainian Christians who have been targeted since the invasion began.

Southern Baptists have long held that authoritarian regimes directly undermine human flourishing and undermine religious liberty. As an outflowing of these beliefs, we have repeatedly emphasized the need for peaceful resolutions to war that uphold the biblical principles of justice. In the foundational document summarizing Southern Baptist beliefs, the [Baptist Faith and Message](#), Southern Baptists have stated the biblical belief that Christians "should do all in their power to put an end to war." While we know that war will never be fully eradicated from the earth, good governance involves a desire and responsibility to bring an end to hostility, and defend the vulnerable caught in the warfare.



In the 1967 SBC Resolution [On Peace](#), Southern Baptists affirmed that the United States has rightly committed to “defend the right of self-determination by the people of many smaller countries.” Additionally, we assured our elected officials that “we support them in developing strong and wise policies...and in helping to maintain order in the world.”

In 2022, messengers at our annual meeting affirmed a Resolution [On the War in Ukraine](#). In this Resolution, we condemned the violent and aggressive actions by the nation of Russia against the Ukrainian people and committed to “stand in solidarity with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in Christ as well as the people of Ukraine who have endured these atrocities and who have witnessed the horrors of war firsthand while seeking to defend their country from an invasion by a hostile army.”

Since Russia’s invasion, our sister Southern Baptist entity, [Send Relief](#), has been on the ground in Ukraine providing aid and serving those displaced by the war. To date, they have worked with Baptist partners to serve nearly 2 million individuals impacted by this conflict. Send Relief has also been active in the [Middle East](#), meeting the needs of thousands in Israel and surrounding regions as the war has continued.

And yet, despite the strong support from our churches, the service given to those displaced, and the horrific persecution faced by our brothers and sisters, the “unwavering support” of our government appears to have waned. Bowing to political factors, Congress has considered ceasing to fund the defense of Ukraine, a United States ally of over thirty years. Still more egregious, the Ukrainian people continue to suffer without the assurance they can count on their most powerful ally to come to their aid.

Support for Ukraine as a sovereign state is neither a new concept nor a controversial policy stance. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan signed into law [H.Con.Res.205](#), which designated November 9, 1982, as a day honoring the establishment of the “Ukrainian Public Group to Promote the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords.” In signing this resolution, President Reagan stated that “we pledge to do all we can to ameliorate the plight of those Ukrainians who have been persecuted by the Soviet authorities for attempting to assert their rights.”

The plea of the Ukrainian people to live and to worship with the same unalienable rights we as Americans possess has remained their cry for over forty years. The Ukrainian people have not shifted in their position, and neither should the United States.

No, it is not a shift in policy stance that has swept Congress and prevented continued funding from being prioritized; rather, it is a shift in political expediency. Just this week on April 9, Senate Majority Leader Schumer [stated](#) on the Senate floor: “...the biggest reason Ukraine is losing the war is



because...the United States House of Representatives [is paralyzed] from taking necessary action.” The United States has been a nation that time and again has sought to be a light upon a hill, an indicator to our partners around the world that where evil reigns, the United States will counter. Here, we have an opportunity to accomplish this goal, protect vulnerable lives, and have an infinitely greater impact than the short term impact of this political moment.

Similarly, after the unproved attack on Israel by Hamas, thousands of evangelical leaders joined the [Evangelical Statement in Support of Israel](#) which affirmed Israel’s right to defend itself terrorism and called on lawmakers to “use their power to take all forms of terrorism seriously and call governments and civil authorities to confront evil work to prevent future attacks so that the innocent and vulnerable will be protected.”

In summary, due to both our long-held beliefs and our experience serving those most impacted by these conflicts, we support the work of Congress in providing additional support to Ukraine and welcome Congress to take action to prevent further loss of life. In addition, we support members working across the aisle to pass meaningful legislation that undergirds our strong commitment to democratic states, including maintaining support for Israel and Taiwan, who themselves face regional conflicts, or threat of such, similar in geopolitical nature to that of Ukraine.

In each of these conflicts, we have witnessed annihilation of innocent lives as autocrats and terrorists seek conquest. As more lives are lost with each destructive blow, we should yearn for a day when the bombs, rockets, and artillery would fall silent. At this time, our nation’s support for these allies is what is required to make that a reality. We urge you to act swiftly in passing such a package as we “do all in (our) power to end war” and save innocent lives.

Respectfully,

Frederick Brent Leatherwood
President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission
of the Southern Baptist Convention