

Remarks by ambassador Ole Egberg Mikkelsen at the launch a joint country program for Ukraine with Dan Church Aid and Norwegian Church Aid as partners, Kyiv, 9 May 2024

I am pleased to extend a warm welcome to all of you to my residence. A special welcome to those of you who have overcome geographical inconveniences by travelling here from faraway Denmark or Norway. Travelling to Kyiv is not an ordinary journey to a European capital. It takes at least 24 hours and it involves different modes of transportation. And while you are here you are sharing the wartime conditions that Ukrainians have been enduring for more than two years. So coming here instead of just having a videoconference is an act of solidarity that Ukrainians really appreciate.

We are gathered here today on the occasion of a new joint country program between Dan Church Aid and Norwegian Church Aid. It makes a lot of sense for two sister organizations to join forces and work together to tackle the humanitarian challenges that Ukraine is facing.

Dan Church Aid came to Ukraine in 2022 immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion. I wish to thank you for doing so in the darkest hour of the Russian aggression. It has been impressive to see how you have adapted your mode of operation based on many years of humanitarian work in hotspots around the world to a Ukrainian context. You support local organizations and community-led responses to humanitarian and ensures the safety of Ukrainians through demining and explosive ordnance risk education. You have two strategic goals: To save lives and to build resilient communities. This is exactly what is needed in a country that is being attacked by a ruthless aggressor.

Just some weeks ago I travelled to the city of Kharkiv. I saw with my own eyes how the Russians are trying to make this vibrant European metropolis of 1,5 million inhabitants a second Aleppo by attacking the energy infrastructure and making the city un-inhabitable. I also saw how Ukrainian and foreign aid workers and local authorities were working hand in hand to assist the citizens of Kharkiv in the midst of relentless Russian air attacks. This illustrates the crucial role that aid workers are playing in Ukraine during the full scale Russian attack. You support the resilience of Ukraine, thus supporting Ukraine's fight for freedom.

This comes with a risk both for Ukrainian and foreign aid workers. Sadly, many have lost their lives also from the family of Lutheran church aid organizations. Just a few months ago two French nationals working for Swiss Church Aid in the Kherson province were killed and three of their colleagues were wounded as their convoy was targeted by Russian drones. Let me take this opportunity to salute all humanitarian workers in Ukraine, whether international or national for their courage, resilience and unwavering humanitarian commitment.

The signing takes place on a special day in the Christian calendar. Today is Ascension Day where Christians are commemorating the ascent of Jesus to heaven on the 40th day after his Resurrection. I could not think of a more appropriate day to commence the new Norwegian-Danish humanitarian partnership between Dan Church Aid and Norwegian ChurchAid.

Ascension is a strong symbol. It is a symbol of light conquering darkness and that that life will always prevail. This is also the very essence of the humanitarian work that is being done in Ukraine amidst unspeakable Russian atrocities.

I wish the new Danish-Norwegian partnership the best of luck.