Eastern European Leaders Respond to Orphan Crisis—KIEV, Ukraine, Feb. 4, 2013

RUSSIAN ADOPTION BAN PROPELS LOCAL CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN ORPHAN CARE

Russia's recent ban of adoptions by U.S. families sent a ripple of shock through the international adoption landscape - and robbed thousands of Russian children of their hope for a family.

While many are calling for the U.S. government to respond, a handful of U.S.-based ministries are taking immediate action. Through a partnership with Eastern European organizations like Russia Without Orphans Alliance, Ukraine Without Orphans and Orphan's Promise, U.S. pastors and orphan care experts are equipping Eastern European pastors to address the orphan crisis in Russia, Ukraine and nearby nations.

"*In 2012, nearly 1,000 Russian children came home to moms and dads in America. We lament the thousands more who lost that opportunity because of the ban,*" said Paul Pennington, founder and executive director of Hope for Orphans - a ministry that equips and connects local churches with the resources needed to effectively respond to the orphan crisis. "*Regardless of if and when the government steps in to help, it's time for the Church in Russia to become a sustainable place of hope for thousands of Russian children needing a family.*"

On Feb. 6-7, more than 500 pastors and ministry leaders crossing denominational lines are gathering in Kiev for just that purpose. They will examine biblical examples of orphan care and learn best practices for leading a church to care for the orphan.

The initiative in Eastern Europe is indicative of a larger movement across the world. Similar partnerships are helping churches in Central America, Northeast Asia and the Middle East tackle orphan care issues in their regions.

"*The international adoption landscape is changing. We're seeing a trend toward domestic adoption even here in the U.S. That's why it's so critical for the local church to be equipped for orphan care and to support adoptive families,*" said Pennington.

"*We believe that church is the key to solving this crisis, and it's of crucial importance for pastors to grasp this vision. There are enough Christian families in Ukraine to provide a loving and caring home for every child who needs it,*" said Ruslan Maliuta, president of the Alliance for Ukraine Without Orphans.

And the local-level approach is successful. Already Ukraine has seen an increase in local orphan care efforts.

"*When I arrived in the Ukraine eight years ago, adoption seemed to be a novel concept. But in passing years I have seen the spirit of adoption invade churches and Christian communities,*" said Karen Springs, Marketing & Development Manager for Orphan's Promise in Eastern Europe.

One church in Ukraine arranged for families to open their homes during the holidays to orphans from a local orphanage. The experience resulted in an ongoing relationship between the host families and the children.

"*For this church the orphans were no longer a statistic, but real children with real stories. Many local families*

have been moved to adopt not because they heard statistics about orphans, but because they stepped out of their comfort zones and began to serve in orphanages and, as result, met children whom they later felt led to adopt," said Springs, who believes the key to orphan awareness is personal involvement.

For more information about the Eastern European Summit visit http://summit2013.kiev.ua/. To speak with an orphan care expert, contact Karen Dye at 404.538.8591.

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