



## **Ukraine: Rebels raiding churches and shutting them down**

*By Madeeha Bakhsh  
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Rebels have been raiding churches in Ukraine's Luhansk region. These rebels are purportedly backed by Russia and have stepped up crackdown against the Protestant churches. These rebels are preventing the closed churches to re-register themselves.

In line with details, these rebels have made re-registration of all religious organizations mandatory, however preventing approval for many trying to re-register. None of the Baptist churches or Seventh Day Adventist churches were allowed to re-register. Seventh Day Adventists had to halt all activities due to the fact that they were not allowed to re-register.

In past few months' time, several Protestant churches have been raided by these rebels while the worshipers were dispersed. In September, armed rebels invaded a Baptist church in Brianka. Pastor of a Baptist church is likely to be punished because he conducted Sunday service without re-registration.

At Revival Baptist church, policemen halted Sunday service telling about 25 worshipers to leave the church. Policemen questioned the worshipers afterwards checked the safe of the church. Pastor of this church is facing threats for allowing Sunday service in the church.

In August, rebels armed with automatic guns stormed into the Grace Church of God in Alchevsk . A worship meeting was going on in the church, when the rebels raided the church. They forced the believers to lie down on the floor, while the rebels seized the computers in the church office.

Ukraine's Institute for Religious Freedom reported that evangelical Christian communities have to cease their operation as they have been barred from re-registration. Any kind of operation without registration would be considered violation of law.

A staff member of the Ellel Ministries stated: "Russia is encouraging this kind of thing to happen, to make sure that there is a completely pro-Russian area surrounding the Russian Federation. They make it impossible for any churches to re-register which means, of course, the churches can no longer operate even in their own buildings". He added, "We pray for our fellow believers there because they are going through a very strongly oppressed time, just as believers are in China, for example".