

*(SOUNDS OF EMERGENCY SUPPLY DISTRIBUTION)*

**Meghan:** *What you're hearing right now is the sounds of a distribution of emergency supplies in central Ukraine. Materials that were packed with care and sent from the United States and Canada. They were distributed a week before the time of this recording.*

*It's been over five months since the Russian military invaded Ukraine. While you likely aren't seeing as much news about Ukraine anymore, the conflict continues. And so does the humanitarian work of MCC's partners. Today on the show, an update from Ukraine.*

*I'm Meghan Mast and you're listening to "Relief, development and podcast," a production of Mennonite Central Committee.*

*(MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN)*

*Our guest today is Nadiya, an MCC staff person in Ukraine. You may notice, I'm not using her last name. This is for security reasons. Nadiya coordinates the distribution of emergency supplies and several emergency response projects with MCC partners in Ukraine.*

-----

*Welcome, Nadiya, thank you for joining us.*

**Nadiya:** Yeah, it's a pleasure. Thank you for having me here.

**Meghan:** *To start, I want to check in with you. I know it's been five months now since the invasion and you have been working really hard with our partners to respond. How are you doing?*

**Nadiya:** Well, thank you for asking that question. I'm, I'm personally I'm doing well. It has been an intense time really it with, yeah, with all that is happening, and also with a lot of work with the emergency response projects our partners are doing. So I've been trying to support them in the best way possible. But yeah, sometimes I feel more hopeful. And sometimes I get a bit discouraged. So yeah, but in general, I'm doing well. Like, thankfully, my family and I we are in the safer place of Ukraine. We like in the beginning of the war, we relocated in the western part of Ukraine, so we feel much safer here.

**Meghan:** *I'm so glad to hear that you're safe and doing relatively well, all things considered. And what are some of the biggest needs you are seeing in your work right now?*

**Nadiya:** Yeah, yeah. Many people were forced to leave their homes and find shelter in other safer parts of Ukraine, like my family and myself. And when evacuating people quickly pick up their emergency bags, and some documents and a change of clothes leaving, their property and all their belongings behind. And over seven million people, over seven million Ukrainians were internally displaced due to the war. And as they tried to settle in, in, in their temporary accommodations, they need all the essential items needed for function and to have some kind of normalcy. And displaced people need hygiene items, towels, blankets, bedding and of course, food. And yeah, and aside the need in essential items, and food people also need emotional and spiritual support very much.

**Meghan:** *A lot of these things that you're mentioning, I know were included in the material resources shipment the emergency supplies that recently arrived in Ukraine, from Canada and the United States. Can you talk a little bit about how those supplies are meeting the need?*

**Nadiya:** Yeah, yeah. Sure. Some of the shipments have already arrived and even some of our partners started distributing them and still one container is on the way. It is already in Europe. So that's, that's great. Yes, so I believe that this material resources that come in shipments from North America, they address the critical, the most relevant need of, of people who are going through, like who are in the emergency situation perfectly. Such things as relief kits and hygiene kits, comforters and canned meat are very relevant in this situation in Ukraine. So that's, yeah, that's exactly what people need now.

**Meghan:** *I know that sometimes people wonder why we are shipping supplies rather than purchasing locally. Can you tell us why these shipments are important right now?*

**Nadiya:** Mm hmm. Yes, yes, absolutely. With the war, a lot of logistical chains were disrupted. And our partners sometimes simply cannot access products and essential items in the amounts they need for their work locally, like through the local suppliers, they, they would have done. So having those containers with material resources is perfect. And that addresses the, the need perfectly, it's very relevant in the situation our country is at.

**Meghan:** *Yeah, that's interesting to hear. Because I know that sometimes it does make more sense to buy locally and MCC does that. And partners do that when possible. But in other situations, it's just not possible.*

**Nadiya:** Right. And it also depends on where our partner is, and like how the war affected the logistics and the, the economy of that of that part. Yeah.

**Meghan:** *Yeah, that makes sense. And I imagine it's a big challenge to be shipping items into a country that is in the middle of such violence in certain areas of the country. Can you explain some of the challenges that are involved?*

**Nadiya:** Yeah, like one of the challenges was, that in the past MCC used to ship containers with material resources to the port in Odesa. And now, it is not possible anymore, because Odesa is affected, has been affected by constant fire attacks from the Black Sea since the beginning of the war. So that is not possible, of course. Therefore, MCC had to think hard and investigate new possibilities how to ship material resources into Ukraine. And I'm grateful to MCC team in North America who worked hard and found a new solution and arranged all the logistics how to ship goods through, through the port in the Netherlands and then by trucks through Western Ukraine into Ukraine to the warehouses of our partners. And like although like even then some of our partners are very close to the front lines and the trucks could not reach all the way to our partners so our partners had to arrange also like we collaborated with them and try to accompany them as much as possible to reload the goods into like other Ukrainian trucks and to deliver them to the warehouses where they can distribute them to, to their participants.

**Meghan:** *Sounds like quite a journey, and that there's a lot of logistics involved, a lot of people trying to problem solve through those issues. Can you explain to our listeners how, how it's decided who receives the items?*

**Nadiya:** Yeah, the material resources, the recipients of material resources are the most vulnerable groups. The people who are in the most critical need and our partners collaborate closely with the local governments and social services who provide them with a list of people who are in the most critical need and who don't get any or don't get sufficient support from the state or other organizations. And currently, the recipients of more or displaced persons, stay-ees people who stayed in their locations for various reasons, although there are suffering from shelling. Also. It is people whose homes were destroyed. People who lost their property it is people who lost their jobs, the elderly people with, with small pension benefits and people with disabilities.

**Meghan:** *I know that you're not there when the shipments are being distributed, but you're in close contact with partners. Have you heard any stories about the people who've received these items that have made a particular impact on you?*

**Nadiya:** Yes, yes definitely. One of the stories that yeah, that impacted me and kind of stayed with me is from, I've heard from our partner in in the village near Kharkiv, they're located in Kharkiv region, and since the beginning of the war Kharkiv, has been under brutal shelling. And there was an elderly lady in Kharkiv, who was in the hospital for receiving some medical treatment. And as she was in the hospital, her house came under fire and was destroyed. And the staff of our partner organization evacuated this lady from the hospital and placed her in, in a House of Hope nursing home. So it is a, it is a new Christian nursing home that is run by our partner organization. And for lunchtime, this lady could not grapple with the reality and kept asking when she could go home, and when she could return home. And so the volunteers and the staff told her the story again and again, that's there is no more home like there isn't that she doesn't have anywhere to go back to that she doesn't have a home to return to. And that, that she can stay with them and that they will take care of her. So yeah, it was too difficult for this lady to comprehend that she doesn't have anywhere to return to. And this lady is still living in, in the House of Hope. And thanks to MCC, and to our partner and to the partnership project with MCC our partner is able to provide her with all the essential items and food, food that she needs for living. And I'm sure that they will not yeah, that they will take care of her.

Yeah, another story that impacted me impressed me is from our partner organization that brings emergency supplies and material resources to villages in Chernihiv region. That region also was affected by heavy shelling almost every day since the beginning of the war. And there is an elderly lady named Nadiya, like her name is just, just like mine. And this name in Ukrainian means "hope," Nadiya means "hope". So this lady is 79 years old. And her husband died from heart attack slightly after the war started. So this lady was left all alone without any relatives in the village. And then her house was completely destroyed by heavy shelling. So she lost everything like all the, and in Ukrainian culture, people don't, don't, don't tend to take loans from the bank or something, they, they just save their money and then they build their houses and then they invest into this house. So and then like, on Monday, she lost everything that she, she has been saving for all her life. And her neighbours took her in for, for some time that she could have a roof over her head. So our partner brings this material resources, this essential items and, and food in the name of Christ. And when, when they come to these villages and see people like Nadiya and the and other villagers, they can share these resources with them in the name of Christ, they give them hope. And they, they it's just yeah, it's just gives you hope for the future that she will be taken care of that there are people who are thinking of her. There are people who are willing to go long ways to help her and other people like that.

And still another story that I've heard recently from our Uman partner. Uman is in central Ukraine, and they have like a large inflow of displaced persons. And they're responding to the needs of these people by distributing food and hygiene items. And after one of the distributions of material resources, a lady came up to the staff of our partner and thanked her and she said that she was very pleased with the atmosphere of the distribution and, and the quality of the items and she said like everything was new and of excellent quality. And then she said that she felt respected and dignified by the way she was treated and she felt like a normal person again. So I was really touched by that, like I, yeah, I was such that even during the war, people can feel dignified and cared for. And that is important. That is something very important that dignity of every person is not lost.

**Meghan:** *Wow, thanks for sharing those stories. And so I know, we've talked about material resource distribution, what are what are some of the other ways that MCC is responding through our partners in Ukraine?*

**Nadiya:** Yeah. Yeah, since the beginning of the war, MCC has been partnering with organizations who are implementing emergency response projects. And there, they have been responding to the most, like relevant, the most urgent needs of displaced people. And some of them are evacuating people from the dangerous places that are affected by shelling, and also providing them with shelter, and with temporary accommodations and with food. And they continue to do that as well. And still, another thing that also our partner, partners are doing now is they also offer psychological support and emotional and spiritual support to the people who need that.

**Meghan:** *And I know it's hard to probably answer this question because things are changing daily, weekly, monthly. But our, what are partners, if anything, what are partners saying about our about longer-term plans to respond?*

**Nadiya:** Yeah, our partners are responding at the moment to the most immediate needs of displaced persons and other people who suffered from the war. And many of them, like I said, are implementing emergency response projects, in partnership with MCC. And although some of the projects have been extended already, it is still difficult to plan something long-term because the context is quickly shifting. However, the way our partners are responding is have somewhat changed already since the beginning of the war. In the beginning, there was a need in transit centers for displaced person, persons who were heading to western Europe, for example Now, many people decided to settle in in western Ukraine. And they need more kind of stable long-term support. And our partners are trying to provide that long-term support to these people.

**Meghan:** *And those were, those are all my questions, but maybe just to end, what do you want people to know about what's happening in Ukraine right now?*

**Nadiya:** When the war just broke out it, yeah, it was hard to believe that this was really happening to my country, it was a shock, was a sense of denial. Why is this happening to my country, cannot be true. And it felt like a, like a horrible dream. And we all hope that soon it will be over. However, the war has been going on for five months now. And it's still not over. And although Ukraine is not as much in the headlines as it was in February, yet, the war in Ukraine is still killing thousands of innocent people. And every household in Ukraine was affected one way or another. Some people lost their loved ones, other their families lost their houses, their homes, still other families were separated. People lost jobs, and millions of people were displaced. And as the limited resources of the state get exhausted, the need is

growing bigger, and Ukraine is facing a humanitarian catastrophe. So many people in Ukraine are still suffering and they feel helpless in the face of the circumstances that they cannot control. And the war has been going on for five months. People get tired and discouraged. And Ukrainians need, they need to know that they're not alone in this and that they're supported, and that there are people around the world who are not indifferent to the suffering of Ukrainians. Please keep praying for, for us and please keep supporting Ukrainians in the ways you can. Every prayer and every bit of assistance is very meaningful and much appreciated.

**Meghan:** *Thanks, Nadiya for your time. I know you're so busy with everything that you're doing right now. So thanks for your time and our thoughts and prayers are with you and everybody else in Ukraine.*

**Nadiya:** Thank you, Meghan. It was, it was an honour. Thank you for having me.

-----

**Meghan:** *That was Nadiya, an MCC staff person in Ukraine.*

*That's it for this episode.*

*Next month, we're covering Indigenous food sovereignty in Guatemala.*

*If you like this podcast, consider subscribing. You can also rate it and tell your friends to give us a listen.*

*This episode of Relief, Development and Podcast was recorded and produced on Treaty 1 territory, the original land of the Anishinaabeg, Cree and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.*

*This episode was produced and hosted by me, Meghan Mast. The head producer is Emily Loewen.*

*A lot is happening in the world right now. This is a difficult time for many. May you experience God's provision and protection as we work together to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ.*

*Thanks and take good care.*

*(MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN)*