

UBS DELEGATES VISIT UKRAINE

In June 2025, a delegation from the United Bible Societies (UBS) visited Ukraine, the first official UBS visit to Ukraine since Ukraine's independence in 1991. The group, which included Secretary General Rev. Dirk Gevers, was warmly welcomed in Kyiv by the Deputy General Secretary of the Ukrainian Bible Society, Anatoliy Raychynets.

Throughout the visit, the group met with prominent church leaders and government officials, and visited key ministries to learn about how Bible Society and the churches are responding to the many challenges they are facing as a result of the war.

Firstly, they met with the Head of the Ukrainian Bible Society, who travelled from embattled Kherson, and with government officials to learn about the harsh realities of life in the eastern occupied territories. Here, many churches have been destroyed, and clergy are in captivity.

Bible Society has a ministry of Bible distribution, trauma healing, and practical support in this region.

They visited Bible Society's Trauma Healing Institute, which trains trauma healing



A chaplain prays with an elderly woman who lives in a town that was previously under occupation. She and her daughter received a Bible and an audio Bible from Bible Society.

PHOTO CREDIT: ©UKRAINIAN BIBLE SOCIETY

Dear Friends of Bible Mission,

Welcome to the Winter edition of The Word at Work. It is a pleasure once again to share with you inspiring updates from our global partners, many of whom are faithfully serving amid significant challenges, including areas affected by conflict.

In June, a delegation from the United Bible Societies (UBS) made its first visit to Ukraine since 1991. The group met with Bible Society staff and church leaders to gain firsthand insight into the challenges they are facing. In another region marked by tension, our colleagues in the Holy Land are under pressure, such as during the escalation of the war between Israel and Iraq last month. This month, we are celebrating a remarkable milestone: 6.1 billion people now have access to the Bible in their heart language, whether through complete Bibles, New Testaments, or Scripture portions. Yet, having the Bible available doesn't always mean it is being read or embraced. Illiteracy can often be a stumbling block to accessing Scripture.

In Benin, where just 47 per cent of the population is literate, Bible Society is working to overcome significant literacy barriers. This year's UBS Day of Prayer, observed on May 9, focused on Bible Engagement. Here, Bible Societies around the world united in prayer, asking that people everywhere would not only receive Scripture in their language but also connect deeply with the Word of God. A special feature was that the Heads of Bible Societies from seven different global contexts provided prayers.

As someone who supports the Bible Society, whether through giving, praying, or volunteering, you are a vital part of this mission. Thank you for all that you do. We are truly grateful for your continued partnership.

In Christ



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Neels Janse van Rensburg'.

Neels Janse van Rensburg
CEO

**The Old City of
Jerusalem as seen
from the Mount of
Olives.**

PHOTO CREDIT: ©STEPHEN WILSON

facilitators and provides both individual and group therapy. There are centres in several cities, and it plays a crucial role in addressing the trauma within Ukrainian communities.

They visited the largest centre for internally displaced persons—currently accommodating 1,000 people—and spoke with residents, who shared their stories of displacement. Bible Society is providing Bibles and supports regular Bible study groups in this community. They also accompanied chaplains to a military hospital, distributing Bibles to wounded soldiers.

The group met with members of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations (UCCRO). Here, a wide range of topics were discussed including the ongoing humanitarian crisis, and the role of churches during wartime. One sobering statistic was that approximately 19,000 children have been forcibly deported to Russia.

A couple in a city in the east, which had been heavily bombed, receiving Bible Society Scriptures from a local church pastor.

PHOTO CREDIT: © UKRAINIAN BIBLE SOCIETY



The church leaders emphasised the vital importance of spreading God's Word to people across Ukraine and among the military. In 2024, the Ukrainian Bible Society distributed 400,000 Bibles, a mission they are committed to expanding. They expressed gratitude to UBS for its support.

"We were deeply moved by the creativity and courage with which the Ukrainian Bible Society is carrying out its ministry. Their resilience is a beacon of light in the darkness of war," said Dirk Gevers, UBS General Secretary.

TACKLING ILLITERACY IN BENIN

In Benin, literacy remains a major challenge, with only 47 per cent of adults able to read and write. Barriers such as poverty and child labour keep many children out of school. Secondary school completion rates are low, with just 27 per cent of girls and 30 per cent of boys finishing their education.

In response, the Bible Society of Benin is working to equip communities with essential literacy skills. This includes training facilitators who are fluent in national languages such as Gun or Fon and who have completed a minimum level of formal education.

Recently, forty-four participants celebrated their achievement at a heartwarming graduation ceremony, where they were awarded level two literacy certificates. The event was attended by the Bible Society's General Secretary, Rev. Gandonu, and the Director of Secondary, Technical, and Professional Teaching of the Ouémé Département, underscoring the importance of the occasion.



Women and girls in a literacy class for Yoruba-speakers at a church in southeast Benin.

PHOTO CREDIT: © JOYCE VAN DE VEEN

Earlier this year, Bible Society hosted a regional workshop focused on integrating literacy with Bible translation. Attended by translation advisors, literacy supervisors, and church leaders from Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Togo, the workshop aimed to strengthen Bible-based literacy efforts in local languages.

By combining literacy training with Scripture translation, the Bible Society of Benin is helping to open doors—for spiritual growth, education, and lasting personal and community transformation.

FAITH UNDER FIRE

As the conflict between Israel and Iran was intensifying, Bible Society leaders and their teams were facing tremendous pressures. Here, the leaders share about the impact of the war on themselves and their teams.

As Israel began its attack on Iran, the Palestinian Bible Society team had just completed a team meeting. As they

attempted to return to their homes, many were delayed, some taking over eight hours to find an open checkpoint. “Last night, we couldn’t sleep as we watched and heard the sound of missiles from our home,” reported Palestinian Bible Society General Secretary, Nashat Filmon.

In northern Israel, the Arab Israeli Bible Society, led by Dina Katanacho, had to immediately send staff home as the missiles began flying overhead. Team members have repeatedly sought refuge in underground shelters, both day and night, listening to missile strikes. Likewise, the staff of the Bible Society in Israel, led by Victor Kalisher, have spent several nights in shelters with their families.

Meanwhile, the Iranian Bible Society in Diaspora, led by Nahid Sepehri, has spent time in reflective prayer. In 1990, the Iranian Bible Society was shut down by the authorities. However, many are coming to faith in Iran with some saying there may be hundreds of thousands or even a million Christians living in Iran.

Iran has not experienced attacks on its own soil since the 1980s. For a whole new generation, these attacks have brought tremendous shock, fear, and uncertainty. The Iranian Bible Society in Diaspora is ministering to Christians through social media and with Scriptures to and by distributing Scriptures.

GLOBAL TRANSLATION MILESTONE

In 2024, Bible Societies worldwide completed Scripture translations in 105 languages, impacting more than 580 million people! Now, over 6.1 billion people have access to the full Bible in their heart language, marking



In September 2024, the Bible Society of Kenya launched the Sagala Audio Bible, marking a historic first for the Sagala-speaking community. Church, administrative, and school leaders, along with Bible translators and recorders attended the event.

PHOTO CREDIT: © CALVIN OMBASA

a significant milestone in the global Bible translation movement.

Breaking it down further, 74 languages received their first-ever Scripture translations, including 13 sign languages. Thirty-two language communities received new or revised translations and study editions.

But despite these milestones, significant challenges remain. Although 52 per cent of the world's languages have some portion of Scripture, 48 per cent still lack access to biblical text. Many of these languages are spoken by small communities, making them vulnerable to extinction.

Rev. Dirk Gevers, UBS General Secretary, reflects on the progress made on Bible translation in 2024: "The global Bible translation movement led by Bible Societies, which began over 220 years ago, celebrates a significant milestone in 2024—providing Scripture in the heart language of over 6.1 billion people.

"However, much work remains, as 48 per cent of languages still lack any biblical text.

Many of these are spoken languages used by small communities; without intervention, they risk being lost. As Bible Societies, our core mission is to make the Bible accessible to everyone, everywhere. In the process, global linguistic diversity is also preserved and enriched."

HELPING TEEN MOTHERS IN GUATEMALA

Guatemala faces one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Latin America. Shockingly, one in three girls becomes a mother before turning eighteen. Sexual violence—particularly against Indigenous girls—is widespread, and many young mothers are forced to raise children in environments marked by poverty, instability, and gang violence.

In response, the Bible Society of Guatemala launched the "Children Having Children" project. This initiative brings hope and healing to teenage mothers through Scripture-based workshops designed to provide emotional, spiritual, and psychological support.

The workshops help the teenage mothers to:

- **understand their identity and value**
- **develop emotional resilience and self-esteem**
- **accept and prepare for the responsibility of raising a child**
- **find spiritual healing and strength through God's Word**

The project reaches girls in both Home Shelters and high-risk communities. This year, the Bible Society of Guatemala has reached forty-four girls with its "Mum's Roller Coaster" material. Each participant also receives a care

package that includes essential baby supplies such as formula, clothing, and nappies—crucial support for these young mothers who often lack financial means.

Testimony

"Since I went to the workshops, I stopped feeling lonely. I understood that I am not the only one going through this. My desire is to continue studying, make my parents proud, and give my son a good future. Thank you for these workshops and for my Bible."

— Teenage mother.

Volunteers also find that they enjoy being involved. *"The Children Having Children project has been a great blessing in my life. After visiting the girls, I spoke about the project at home, and now my daughter is also volunteering. We first reached out to five girls in La Esperanza. They were very shy, but once we spoke with them, they were encouraged and excited to participate. We are praying and trusting God that more girls will come and be blessed,"* said a project volunteer.

The project is currently operating in three departments and there are plans for further expansion.

A young mother-to-be with supplies she has received from the Bible Society of Guatemala.

PHOTO CREDIT: © JOSE GARCIA



A GIFT IN YOUR WILL

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HERE'S HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Will you prayerfully consider making a gift to help support churches in Laos, Malawi and Kazakhstan?

IN MEMORIAM

Bible Society has learned of the passing of the following friends. Gifts towards the work of Bible Society's mission have been made in their memory. Their work of love goes on.

Neil Joseph Hampton



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WEBSITE
www.biblesociety.org.nz

THE LAST WORD

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1 (NIV)

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