

Franklin Graham Leads Ukraine's Largest Evangelistic Crusade

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In the Ukraine, where a little under 20 years ago Christian crusades would have been forbidden, an estimated 230,000 people heard the gospel during Franklin Graham's first evangelistic festival in the once communist nation. Roughly 125,000 people convened at Olympic Stadium in the capital, Kiev, on July 6-8, with some attendees traveling 17 hours. An estimated 107,000 watched the festival via satellite at 104 different venues. By the crusade's end, nearly 7,000 people made decisions for Christ. "For years Samaritan's Purse has used the Ukrainian Antonov airplane to transport hundreds of thousands of our Operation Christmas Child shoe box gifts," Graham, president and CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan's Purse, told festival attendees. "Now I am here in your country, not because of the Antonov, but because of the gospel, the good news that you can have spiritual freedom found in Jesus Christ." The festival brought together 4,366 churches and thousands of volunteers from 15 denominations. Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko sent his orchestra and welcomed Graham to his nation in a statement read during the event. "This festival is one of the greatest things that can bring us closer together," Yushchenko wrote. "Thank you for all the work you are doing here. May God bless you." Before Graham left the country he helped distribute 100,000 gift-filled shoeboxes to orphans.- **Felicia Mann**