

Standing up for Ukraine is standing up for democracy



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RUSSIA INVADED UKRAINE on Feb. 24, despite a 1994 treaty it signed, the Budapest Memorandum, guaranteeing Ukraine's sovereignty forever. The events over the past week have been difficult for those watching it unfold; but obviously far less difficult and painful than for the people of Ukraine themselves and for their family and friends who live abroad, including right here in Canada. Canada has a large population of Ukrainian Canadian citizens, nearly 1.4 million as of 2016. The first confirmed settlement of Ukrainians in Canada was in the late 19th century, when Ivan Pylypow helped to found the Edna-Star settlement east of Edmonton in 1892. I can't imagine what Ukrainian Canadians must be going through right now, seeing this tragedy occurring half a world away. Ukrainian Canadian Oksana C. [last name withheld at her request], who lives in Flinton, Ontario, can not only imagine it, but is getting day to day feedback of the Russian invasion from her family who is still in Ukraine. On Feb. 28 she recounted to Bancroft This Week the details she has heard from them as the Russian invasion unfolds, saying that it has been a nightmare for the past four days. "As I am writing to you at this moment, Ukraine is preparing for a nuclear attack and they are sending messages with information to each other on how to survive it. My parents are there right now. My father is not fit for travel as he is very sick at the moment. My mom is looking after him. My younger sister and her two small children [six-years-old and eight-months-old] together with my older sister crossed the Polish border last night and found temporary protection there. We are very thankful to Poland and other neighbouring countries for giving women and children shelter, food and medical supplies. My younger sister's husband stayed in Ukraine of course to join Ukrainian forces when needed to protect our land," she says. Oksana C. says she has heard first hand from her family there that Ukrainian major cities are getting destroyed and the Russians are trying to bomb army bases, hospitals, airports, roads, bridges, manufacturing sites, and hydro stations. She says that unidentified individuals are driving around large and small towns and marking spots with night vision paint for Russian air forces to hit. She said there is even one on the main road near the church in her little town. However, she says that the Ukrainian army is standing strong, and that people are preparing and delivering home cooked meals and drinks for the Ukrainian troops. "The support from around the world has been incredible. We see doctors and nurses coming from other countries to help wounded soldiers and civilians, we see food, medical and military supplies coming in. But the most important thing is here-we have heard from some of our soldiers that they are feeling our prayers. They don't understand how but they come out with minimal loss from deadly situations. They ask us to keep praying for them. Please, continue to keep our Ukrainian soldiers and the people of Ukraine in your prayers," she says. If Canada doesn't do all it can to stand up for the Ukrainian people, there is also the extreme likelihood that once Russia takes over Ukraine, this will just whet their appetite and they'll invade other nations that used to be part of the Soviet Union to recapture, in their minds, past glories. And they may not stop there. Putin has even implied that Russia would strike militarily and possibly with nuclear weapons, any country that comes to Ukraine's aid, including Canada. For example, on Feb. 27, hundreds of protesters gathered outside the Russian embassy in

Ottawa in solidarity to Ukraine, prompting Russia's foreign ministry to threaten retaliation if Canada did not keep its diplomats safe. The prospect of Russia striking at and even taking over a rapidly thawing Canadian north is ever more a viable threat. Make no mistake, standing up for Ukraine is standing up for democracy, freedom, human rights and international law. To its credit, Canada has taken definitive steps to denounce Russia's actions and impose sanctions on them. On Feb. 24, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made it clear that Canada condemns Russia's attack on Ukraine and will take strong action to stand up for what is right and protect the rights and freedoms of the Ukrainian people. So far, Canada has imposed economic sanctions, sent military equipment and humanitarian aid, and taken steps to fast-track immigration for Ukrainians fleeing Ukraine and wanting to come to Canada. They have also sent additional military contributions to support NATO through Operation REASSURANCE and have authorized approximately 3,400 Canadian Armed Forces personnel to deploy to the NATO Response Force if they're required. While this a good start, hopefully Canada will keep up the pressure on Russia and do even more until Russia leaves Ukrainian soil. So yes, stand up for Ukraine and pray for their success against the Russian invasion as we would stand up for Canada, to protect democracy, the international rule of law, human rights and every country's right to their freedom and national sovereignty. If we don't do this, Russia, emboldened by any success it has in Ukraine, most likely will attack its former Soviet nation states in eastern Europe, then other countries in Europe and then perhaps even Canada via the rapidly thawing Arctic, and someday we just might be in Ukraine's position. N.B. According to Oksana C. if any Canadian wants to send humanitarian aid to Ukraine, Meest Corporation Inc. is accepting a myriad of humanitarian aid supplies that they can deliver to Ukraine. All packages will be delivered into Lviv and dispersed to relevant Ukrainian relief organizations. For further information on items needed and restricted items not to send are available by emailing Meest at info.canada@meest.com or by calling their customer service number at 1-800-361-7345. Supplies can also be dropped off at Meest's offices at 250 Greenbank Road in Ottawa.