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TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: Stephen M. Greenberg, Chairman;
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UKRAINE UPDATE #27

Victory Day celebrations took place across the former Soviet region today commemorating the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany. However, festivities in several Ukrainian cities were scaled back because of concern of potential provocations by pro-Russian groups.

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Crimea today to participate in Victory Day celebrations in Sevastopol. He delivered a speech noting the historical significance of the recent Crimean referendum. The government of Ukraine condemned the visit, calling it a "provocation [that] once again confirms that Russia deliberately chooses to escalate tensions in Russian-Ukrainian relations."

The Ukrainian government continued anti-terrorist operations against pro-Russian militants in Eastern Ukraine. Deadly violence broke out in the city of Mariupol, in the Donetsk region, as a result of clashes between the government troops and armed separatists.

NCSJ spoke today with Mariupol's Jewish community representatives, who reported an alarming situation in the city. Shots are being fired and local residents are staying home.

The Jewish community is not being singled out, but there is a general concern about the availability of food and other basic necessities if the situation worsens. The community also reported that the rabbi of Mariupol has left the city.

The situation is more peaceful in Slavyansk, where Jewish community leaders reported a stable situation. Small Victory Day celebrations took place today without incident and Hesed centers are open, they said.

The Jewish community of Slavyansk is concerned about potential unrest on May 11, when pro-Russian separatists in the region are planning to hold a referendum on secession from Ukraine, despite President Putin's call to postpone the vote.

In Kharkiv, the situation is stable. Speaking with NCSJ, Jewish community representatives said that small, peaceful Victory Day celebrations took place in Kharkiv today. They also reported that a small group of armed men were detained by local police, on suspicion of planning provocations to incite unrest in the city.

According to Ukrainian media reports, dozens of Pro-Russian separatists stormed a building in Donetsk today. Some eyewitnesses reported that Ukrainian troops sent to prevent the building's takeover fled, surrendering their weapons to separatists. Unrest has been also reported in other parts of the city.

As always, NCSJ will continue to monitor the situation throughout Ukraine, and provide you with timely and critical updates.

About NCSJ

NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia, founded in 1971, represents the organized American Jewish community in monitoring and advocating on behalf of the estimated 1.5 million Jews living in the 15 successor states of the former Soviet Union.

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