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TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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UKRAINE UPDATE #23



[A Sevastopolskaya Gazeta photo](#) of a recent desecration of the Memorial to the Victims of the Holocaust. See below for details.

Yesterday, Ukraine's government renewed its anti-terrorist operations in Eastern Ukraine, after finding the bodies of two pro-Ukrainian activists (allegedly tortured and killed by pro-Russian forces) near Slavyansk.

In response, Russia warned that any attack on Russian citizens in Ukraine would be considered an attack on the Russian Federation itself. In what appears to be a strong warning of a possible military action in Ukraine, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov referred to Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia, saying "if our interests, our legitimate interests, the interests of Russians [in Ukraine] have been attacked directly, like they were in South Ossetia for example, I do not see any other way but to respond in full accordance with international law."

Lavrov also harshly criticized Ukraine for not implementing the Geneva accords signed last week and accused the interim Ukrainian government of being directly controlled by Washington.

During his visit to Ukraine earlier this week, Vice President Joe Biden warned that Russia could face a new round of sanctions unless pro-Russian forces vacate occupied government buildings in Eastern Ukraine and Russia pulls back its troops from the Ukraine border.

Vice President Biden also announced \$50 million in new U.S. aid to support the upcoming presidential elections and provide Ukraine with non-lethal military aid. In meetings with the interim government, members of the Verkhovna Rada, and Ukraine's civil society, the Vice President vowed U.S. support for a strong Ukraine, saying "we want to be your partner, your friend in the project. And we're ready to assist."

Meanwhile, pro-Russian separatists continue to control regional and city administrations and other government buildings in Eastern Ukraine. Kidnappings and torture of pro-Ukrainian activists have been reported in the area.

NCSJ contacted several Jewish communities in Eastern and Southern Ukraine today. Jewish community leaders in Donetsk report that the situation in the city is stable. Authorities are providing additional security for government buildings and more police units are on patrol to guarantee safety on the streets.

According to Jewish community leadership, the anti-Semitic leaflet incident in Donetsk is being investigated, but so far those responsible haven't been found.

They also said Jews are showing an increased interest in emigration to Israel, Germany, the U.S., and Canada.

The situation is worse outside of Donetsk in the region, where there are reports of unrest, shootings, and anarchy in Slavyansk and small cities nearby.

NCSJ contacted the Jewish community in Slavyansk, which has close to 100 members. Community representatives reported an alarming situation. There is a general sense of anxiety in Slavyansk, firearm shots are being heard every day, and the security situation is deteriorating. Pro-Russian groups have seized control of the city television station, and Ukrainian TV channels have been replaced by Russian stations.

Most alarmingly, these new Russian TV in Slavyansk and in nearby cities include an extreme anti-Semitic TV station, which is blaming Jews for the takeover of power in Kyiv and 'investigating' the Jewish background of key interim government figures, such as Dnipropetrovs'k regional governor Ihor Kolomoysky.

The Jewish community of Slavyansk has not been targeted yet, but feels very insecure. No public Passover celebrations were held, because of unrest in the city.

In Kharkiv, small pro-Russian demonstrations continue to take place.

In Odessa, the situation is stable, but the Jewish community remains concerned about potential anti-Semitic provocations. Passover celebrations were held throughout the city, without incident.

These cities, as well as others, are also feeling the effect of Ukraine's burgeoning economic crisis. Many elderly Ukrainian Jews are especially vulnerable to the rise in prices for food and medicine. Hesed centers have increased their support.

In the Crimean city of Sevastopol, a memorial for Holocaust victims was desecrated two days ago.

In Simferopol, the Jewish community reported that bank closings have affected the community funds. The community leadership, however reported successful and peaceful Passover celebrations in Simferopol, Evpatoriya, and Kerch, organized with financial support of several Russian Jewish organizations.

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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