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TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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UKRAINE UPDATE #19

Unrest intensified in Eastern Ukraine yesterday, as hundreds of pro-Russian demonstrators stormed city administrations and other government buildings in Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Luhansk.

Pro-Russian demonstrators in Donetsk announced the creation of an independent 'people's republic', demanded a referendum on joining Russia by May 11, and urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to send troops.

On Saturday, Ukrainian authorities detained an armed group in Luhansk, which they said was plotting an armed seizure of power.

The unrest continued in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv today, as pro-Russian groups clashed with pro-Ukrainian activists. At least one person is reported dead and dozens injured.

In Luhansk, pro-Russian groups seized the Ukrainian Security Service's (SBU) regional headquarters, and now have access to weapons. The protesters are calling for the release of 15 individuals who were SBU arrested earlier on suspicion of plotting an armed seizure of power. The protesters also demand a referendum on secession.

Ukrainian authorities blamed the unrest on Russia. Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk called Russia's actions a "plan of destabilizing Ukraine in action," aimed at creating a pretext for military invasion.

NCSJ has spoken with Jewish community leadership in Donetsk. They reported that while the Donetsk city administration had been previously seized twice, the most recent seizure appears to be more serious. Shots have been fired, and although no one was harmed, they fear possible escalation.

While the Jewish community has not been affected, there is a general sense of anxiety. Increased inquiries about emigration by both Jewish and non-Jewish residents have been reported.

NCSJ also spoke with Jewish community leaders in Kharkiv, who said the situation in the city is alarming. Pro-Russian demonstrators who took over the city administration over the weekend appear to be non-residents of the city. Their numbers have increased, and they are actively instigating clashes with pro-Ukrainian demonstrators. As a result of the clashes, close to 20 people have been injured.

Several sources have said that the most active pro-Russian demonstrators are not locals, but "political tourists" from Russia. The Head of the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Andrii Parubij, said protesters included "elite special units that are trying to arrive to Ukraine with weapons."

NCSJ will continue to monitor the situation in Ukraine and provide you with critical and timely 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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