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TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: Stephen M. Greenberg, Chairman;
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UKRAINE UPDATE #12

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry met in Kyiv today with the new Ukrainian government, parliamentarians, and members of civil society and the religious community, including Chief Rabbi of Ukraine Yaakov Bleich.

Speaking in Kyiv, Sec. Kerry urged Russia to withdraw its forces from Crimea, warning that the U.S would isolate Russia "politically, economically and diplomatically."

Sec. Kerry said that the U.S. is working on a set of economic and diplomatic sanctions against Russia, which may include asset freezing and visa bans. The U.S. administration has already suspended military cooperation and bilateral trade talks with Russia.

Reaching a unified U.S.-EU response, however, is likely to be difficult, due to divisions among the European states. Germany has argued for finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis, and British and Dutch officials have said they will not back trade sanctions.

Sec. Kerry also announced that the United States is putting together a financial package of \$1 billion in loan guarantees, along with training to help implement reforms, and is working closely with the IMF on further assistance to Ukraine.

Ukraine's acting President Oleksandr Turchynov, however, has said that Ukraine needs \$35 billion in financial aid to avert economic disaster. Contributing to Ukraine's financial instability is Russia's threat to end gas discounts for Ukraine if it doesn't pay its \$1.5 billion gas debt.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin, during a press conference this morning, denied the presence of Russian military force in Crimea, and said the use of force is "a last resort." President Putin also said he had ordered troops "involved in military exercises" along the Ukrainian border back to their bases.

Despite the temporary easing of the tensions surrounding a potential military confrontation in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, Moscow continues to argue that the ouster of erstwhile President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich was illegitimate, and that Russia needs to "protect Russian citizens living in Crimea from the attacks of ultra-nationalists."

The Kremlin accuses Ukraine's new government of ethnic and religious intolerance. However, Ukraine's religious communities, including the Jewish community, are supporting the new government, and calling on Russia to "stop its aggression against Ukraine."

In an open letter, Ukrainian religious leaders, including Rabbi Bleich and the heads of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, urged Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine.

Rabbi Bleich also accused Russia of "anti-Semitic provocations" in Crimea to destabilize the situation.

NCSJ is in regular contact with many Ukrainian Jewish community leaders, none of whom is calling for an evacuation or other drastic measures. Perpetuation of information that overstates the crisis' impact on Ukraine's Jews is doing a disservice to the Ukrainian Jewish community.

NCSJ will continue to be in contact with the Ukrainian Jewish community and others to provide you with timely updates regarding the situation in Ukraine and its impact.

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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