



NewsWatch

December 2009

NCSJ, Jewish National Fund Co-Lead Mission to Russia

NCSJ and the Jewish National Fund co-sponsored a five-day senior leadership mission to Moscow in November, led by NCSJ Chairman Richard B. Stone and JNF New England Regional President Larry B. Cohen, along with professional staff Rick Krosnick, JNF National Campaign Coordinator, and Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director. Participants also included former NCSJ President Lesley Israel and her husband, Fred Israel.

The mission, which preceded JNF's annual trip to Israel, provided the JNF leaders with a first-hand experience of what life is like for Jews in Russia (one of the Diaspora's largest Jewish communities), and an opportunity to see the work of NCSJ. JNF is one of NCSJ's member agencies, and it was the first visit to Russia for most of the JNF participants.

Mission participants met with Moscow Jewish community leaders, including Chief Rabbi of Russia Adolf Shayeveich, Russian Foreign Ministry officials, U.S. Ambassador John Beyrle and Israeli Ambassador Anna Azari. The group toured Moscow, visiting the Kremlin, Red Square and the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, and a number of significant Jewish sites, including the Poklonnaya Gora, Bronnaya and Choral Synagogues.

NCSJ Student Advocacy Program in Washington, D.C.

From October 12-19, 2009, NCSJ hosted 16 Russian and American Jewish students for an eight-day advocacy training program in Washington, D.C.

Jewish students from Moscow, American University (AU) and The George Washington University participated in an exclusive leadership program focusing on advocacy and cross-cultural dialogue. The program, coordinated by NCSJ in collaboration with the Moscow and AU Hillels, was funded by the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington's Washington-Moscow Connection Committee. The program was led by Lesley Weiss, NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs, in coordination with Anna Ermanok, Moscow Hillel Director of Public Relations, and Mindy Hirsch, American University Hillel Associate Director.

Students from Moscow Hillel who participated in NCSJ's Student Leadership Program in Moscow in 2008 and 2009 joined their American counterparts to continue their educational and leadership development, addressing issues such as Jewish identity, combating anti-Semitism, and building civil society. The ongoing Student Leadership Program develops the next generation of international Jewish leadership, building bonds between leaders in the United

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NCSJ President Richard Stone (far left) and JNF leaders meet with Ambassador Anna Azari at the Embassy of Israel in Moscow.



NCSJ Student Advocacy Program participants and trip leaders at the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Washington, D.C.

Student leaders in Washington met with government officials

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States and the former Soviet Union.

The program included a busy schedule of meetings and experiences, at venues such as the Russian and Israeli Embassies, Office of Russian Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission). The participants visited the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington and took a Russian language tour of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. They also toured the White House, U.S. Capitol, and the Newseum, a museum dedicated to

journalism and freedom of the press.

The participants met with Washington, D.C.-area Jewish community representatives, including Misha Galperin, Executive Director and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington and Wayne Firestone, President of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. The participants also met with representatives from the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League and B'nai B'rith International.

During the week, the students visited the American University Hillel, located in the AU Kay Spiritual Life Center. They par-

ticipated in Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat services and dinner at the University of Maryland College Park Hillel, Saturday morning services with MesorahDC at the Sixth & I Historic Synagogue and Havdalah services at the home of a participant.

Visit www.ncsj.org/SLP.html for a full report on the October Student Leadership Program.

Below: (Left) Federation CEO Misha Galperin speaks to participants. (Right) Participants meet with (l.-r.) Kyle Parker and Ron McNamara at the U.S. Helsinki Commission.



NCSJ President Smukler Speaks at JFNA General Assembly

On November 9, at the Jewish Federations of North America annual General Assembly, held this year in Washington, D.C., NCSJ President Alexander "Sasha" Smukler participated in a panel discussion on the state of Russian Jews in the larger Jewish community. The panel was part of a series of workshops addressing the theme of "Inspiration, Innovation and Engagement." The other panelists were Robert Singer, CEO of World ORT, Sandra F. Cahn, co-founder of Limmud FSU, Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, a member of the Genesis Philanthropy Group's advisory board, and Sanford "Sandy" R. Cardin, President of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation. The panel was moderated by Marina Belotserkovsky, Senior Director of Russian Communications and Outreach at the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

Russian-speaking Jews live all over the

world, from former Soviet republics to North America to Israel, where they make up a significant percentage of the population. The panel noted that while they have been successful as a group in their new homes, many are disconnected from Jewish life. Participants talked about initiatives and strategies to engage Russian-speaking Jews in local Jewish communal life and with the global community.

As a former refusenik activist and current community leader, Smukler provided a unique perspective for the overflowing audience. Speaking after the program, he said, "Today, the Jewish communities in the FSU,

which form the world's third-largest Jewish population, depend on NCSJ for protection of their political and religious freedoms, and the Russian-speaking Jewish community here is eager and willing to help us to ensure their safety and development."



(l.-r.) NCSJ President Sasha Smukler, World ORT CEO Robert Singer, and Schusterman Foundation President Sandy Cardin.

NCSJ Helps Celebrate 20 Years of Jewish Renewal in Russia

On December 1, NCSJ Executive Director Mark Levin joined a group of Russian and international Jewish leaders to honor Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt at a dinner in Moscow, on his 20th anniversary of service to the Jewish people as Moscow's Chief Rabbi.

Rabbi Goldschmidt, one of Europe's most active rabbis since the fall of Communism, founded the Russian Jewish Congress and has led the Conference of European Rabbis in drawing Russian and European Jewry closer together. His work continues in this effort as Chairman of the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations of Russia (also known as KEROR).

Rabbi Goldschmidt founded the Jewish Children's Home in 1999, Moscow's first Jewish orphanage in more than 60

years. The orphanage operates jointly with the Etz Chaim Jewish Day School, run by Rabbi Goldschmidt's wife Dara, and the Etz Chaim children's summer camp, to educate Russia's Jewish youth and foster Jewish culture.

The evening celebration honoring Rabbi Goldschmidt was hosted by Boris Shpigel, President of the World Congress of Russian Jewry, and a Member of the upper house of Russia's parliament. The dinner took place during a week of Jewish events in Moscow, including the annual meeting of the Central Conference of European Rabbis, and a ceremony at Rabbi Goldschmidt's Choral Synagogue to honor Ambassador Ronald S. Lauder for his support of the Gedolah Toras Chaim Yeshiva in Moscow.

The leadership gathered in Moscow that week also celebrated the 20th anni-

versary of the VAAD, the first independent Jewish organization founded under the Soviet government. NCSJ was present in Moscow at the first meeting of the VAAD in 1989, at the Shalom Theatre.

On the evening of December 2 at the Shalom Theatre, NCSJ participated in a festive program hosted by President and Founder of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress Alexander Machkevitch, saluting VAAD founders. Over 500 guests attended, including founders Mikhail Chlenov, Roman Spektor, and Josef Zissels; Russian Jewish Congress President Yuri Kanner; Amb. Ronald Lauder; Israeli Ambassador to Russia Anna Azari and Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman. Other Jewish organizations attending included the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, World Jewish Congress and Jewish Agency for Israel.

NCSJ Update on Ukraine: Babi Yar, Uzhgorod

In September, the Kyiv City Council approved a plan to build 28 new hotels in the capital, including one at the site of the Babi Yar Memorial. The memorial marks the site where more than 33,700 Jews were rounded up and shot over 48 hours, beginning on Sept. 29, 1941. In the ensuing months, the ravine was filled with an estimated 100,000 bodies.

NCSJ and other national Jewish organizations raised their concerns and objections about this construction plan directly with Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, during his visit to New York City for the United Nations General Assembly opening in September. In addi-

tion, NCSJ worked closely with Ukraine's Embassy in Washington, D.C., to ensure that local Kyiv officials understood why this decision had to be overturned. President Yushchenko said he did not believe the construction would occur, and shortly after he met with NCSJ, the Mayor of Kyiv announced that no construction would take place on the site.

Uzhgorod Mayor Serhiy Ratushniak made headlines in August for saying that Arseniy Yatsenyuk, a leading presidential candidate and Member of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukraine's parliament), is an "impudent Jew...successfully serving to thieves who are at power in Ukraine,

[and] is using criminal money to plow ahead towards Ukraine's presidency."

Prosecutors accused Ratushniak of exceeding his authority and violating the equal rights of citizens on the basis of race or nationality. Mayor Ratushniak is running for president in the January 2010 election, one of 18 individuals who met Ukraine's requirements to be listed on the ballot. His candidacy is not expected to be successful, but it provides him with a nationwide platform to spread his message of hate. NCSJ has pressed Ukraine's political establishment for a stronger response against xenophobia and anti-Semitism and has asked officials to condemn these extremist statements.

Report on the United Nations Goldstone Investigation and Vote

During 2009, former South African Justice Richard J. Goldstone led a United Nations Human Rights Council investigation of alleged human rights and humanitarian law violations related to Israel's December 2008 incursion into the Gaza Strip.

Justice Goldstone's report on the investigation has been widely discredited for its lack of objectivity, dishonest methodology, and biased mandate. The Goldstone report singles out Israel for criti-

cism while downplaying the actions of Hamas, which during the conflict used women and children as human shields and stored weapons and rocket launchers in kindergartens and hospitals. On October 16, the members of the 47-nation UNHRC adopted a resolution endorsing the report on a vote of 25 in favor, six opposed and eleven abstaining (three other members declined to vote). The resolution condemned Israel, and ignored Hamas' terrorism.

Ukraine was one of only six countries to vote against the resolution in the Council's vote (along with four other European nations and the United States), and one of 18 countries voting against the resolution in the General Assembly vote in November. Russia, the only other former Soviet country in the UNHRC, voted in favor of the resolution during the Council's vote, but abstained from voting in the General Assembly.

World Union Dedicates New Progressive Synagogue in Moscow

On October 8, the World Union for Progressive Judaism officially opened L'Dor v'Dor (From Generation to Generation), a new Jewish community center and synagogue in the heart of Moscow. According to the World Union, the event marked the completion of the first stage of a World Union commitment to the growth of Progressive Judaism in the FSU, and its mission statement: "To build and connect Progressive Jewish communities world-

wide."

The six donors who funded the project were Edward and Svetlana Kaufman from Moscow, who underwrote the renovation, and Susan and James Klau, and Anne Molloy and Henry Posner III from the United States, who funded the purchase. Anne Molloy is a member of NCSJ's Board of Governors and chair of the World Union's FSU Committee.

NCSJ President Alexander Smukler

was also present for the dedication and joined with the over 120 guests and dignitaries at the Thursday evening ceremony in celebration. Guests included World Union leaders and Israeli Ambassador Anna Azari; Steven Schwager, chief executive of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee; Michael Steiner, representing the United Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh; and FSU-based Rabbis Alexander Lyskovoy and Leonid Bimbat.



(Left.) Rabbis Lyskovoy (right) and Bimbat carry Torah scrolls into the new sanctuary under a tallit chupah held by the donors. (Right) Anne Molloy and Henry Posner III. (photos: WUPJ)

Save The
Dates For
2010!

*NCSJ Board of
Governors Meetings*

Tuesday, June 15, 2010

Tuesday, December 7, 2010



2020 K Street, NW, Suite 7800
Washington, D.C. 20006

Tel.: 202-898-2500
Fax: 202-898-0822

www.ncsj.org

Email: ncsj@ncsj.org

Chairman
President
Executive Director
NewsWatch Editor
NewsWatch Writer

Richard B. Stone
Alexander Smukler
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