JEWISH FEDERATIONS AND THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE

Updated March 3, 2022

After more than a week of fighting, while Russian forces have redoubled their efforts, they have still not succeeded in conquering the Ukrainian capital Kyiv. Meanwhile a major humanitarian crisis is unfolding, and Jewish Federations, our partners, the Israeli government, philanthropic foundations, and other players are working around the clock to deliver critical assistance, including helping the thousands of Jews attempting to leave Ukraine. This Sunday, the first plane of Ukrainian Olim will arrive in Israel since the crisis began.

(For background on the crisis, as well as information on the Jewish community in Ukraine, see here).

FIGHTING

The latest on the conflict:

- Russian forces continue to move closer to Kyiv, but have not yet succeeded in capturing Ukraine's capital. The 40-mile Russian military convoy, "remain stalled," according to Pentagon spokesman John Kirby, who added that the troops could be "regrouping," or facing challenges such as supply shortages and Ukrainian resistance.
- The mayor of the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson said the city had fallen to Russian troops on Wednesday, and added that Ukrainian forces had now left. Meanwhile Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, faced intense shelling yesterday, with Russian missile strikes hitting at least three schools, a cathedral and shops.
- One million people have left Ukraine in just a week, according to the UN. At the same time, some Ukrainian volunteers were traveling in the opposite direction — returning to the country to join the ranks of those defending it.
- The major Ukrainian cities of Kyiv and Kharkiv are suffering from bombardment, which has led to many civilian casualties, including among the Jewish population. Tens of thousands of residents are trapped in homes and shelters, with thousands crowded into underground subway stations for protection. Only the young and healthy are attempting the dangerous journey to the borders to try to escape the country.
- Reports of damage to the site of Babyn Yar, where thousands of Jews were murdered by the Nazis, are still being confirmed. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky tweeted, “To the world: what is the point of saying ‘never again’ for 80 years, if the world stays silent when a bomb drops on the same site of Babyn Yar? At least 5 killed. History repeating…” Israel’s Foreign Minister Yair Lapid offered Israel’s assistance in repairing any damage that may have been caused to the site.
- Hillel International operates programs serving some 600 Jewish students in Kharkiv. Yesterday (Wednesday), the historic central city building which houses Hillel was shelled and destroyed by Russian troops. No Hillel injuries were reported.

ISRAELI RESPONSE

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett spoke by phone to both Ukrainian President Zelensky and Russian President Putin yesterday, following numerous similar calls in recent days. Zelensky tweeted that he discussed "Russian aggression" with Bennett, and ongoing reports suggest that Zelensky is keen to have Jerusalem help broker a deal. Nonetheless, no progress towards any end to hostilities has been reported.

President Zelensky has also asked Israel to send arms to assist his country repel Russian forces, but so far, the Israeli government has only sent humanitarian aid. When asked by a reporter yesterday whether Israel will send weapons, Prime Minister Bennett said that Israel's "policy is measured and responsible. We are thinking about all dimensions and considerations…We are doing what we can to help alleviate some of the pressures and consequences of this horrific situation."

An Israeli shipment of about 100 tons of humanitarian aid arrived in Ukraine yesterday, including 17 tons of medical equipment and medicine, water purification systems intended to supply 200,000 people, emergency water supply kits for 100,000 people, winter tents to house 3,000, 15,000 blankets, 3,000 sleeping bags and 2,700 winter coats.

On Tuesday, Ukrainian Ambassador to Israel Yevgen Korniychuk told Israeli reporters that dozens of Ukrainian nationals had arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport and were sent back despite the ongoing humanitarian crisis. The ambassador said that Israeli officials were asking for bonds of up to $6,000 to allow someone to remain in the country, money that none of these refugees have. The Israeli Interior Ministry has denied that Ukrainian refugees were not allowed into the country, and Prime Minister Bennett has instructed officials to show leniency and understanding.

INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS

- A second round of talks will take place today, Thursday, between delegations from Ukraine and Russia, held in Belarus. The first round on Monday lasted five hours and ended without significant progress.
- The International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands said on Wednesday it would immediately proceed with an active investigation following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- Israel was one of 141 countries at the United Nations General Assembly who voted overwhelmingly to condemn Russia's invasion on Wednesday. The result is legally non-binding, but carries global political weight.
- The economic sanctions against Russia have also hit numerous Russian Jewish oligarchs. See here for details.
- Meanwhile Palestinians and Jordanians have also cooperated to get refugees out of Ukraine. See here for more.

President Zelensky has released numerous videos that have been widely viewed around the world. (For an analysis of the videos, see here). In a video address to the world's Jewish communities, Zelensky, who is also Jewish, said, "Last night we were all bombed in Kyiv. And we all died again in Babyn Yar - from a missile attack ... I am now addressing all the Jews of the world - can't you see what is happening? Therefore, it is very important that now millions of Jews around the world won't be silent. Nazism is born in silence. Therefore, shout about the killings of civilians. Shout about the killings of Ukrainians." See more here. The Ukrainian President also tweeted in Hebrew. See here for additional details.

FEDERATIONS AND PARTNERS ON THE GROUND

Jewish Federations have mobilized quickly and powerfully, opening local mailboxes and engaging their communities to support the extraordinary needs arising in the field. Federations have sent millions of dollars to partner agencies on the ground, in support of relief efforts for the Ukrainian Jewish community. JFNA's Ukraine Allocations Subcommittee met Tuesday to review funding requests. The Subcommittee approved an initial allocation of $7.9M and made plans to meet next week to review and approve additional requests so funds continue flowing where they are needed most. This first round of funding saw dollars going to The Jewish Agency for Israel, JDC, World ORT, United Hatzalah, and Hillel International.

These collective emergency funds will address major areas of need as identified by federation partners, including:

- Humanitarian support including first aid, basic necessities such as food, medicine and clothing, and medical support.
- Transportation to bring displaced people to the borders or safe facilities, and temporary housing either in Ukraine or while they wait to make Aliyah or shelter outside the conflict zone.
- Security grants to small Jewish organizations across Ukraine.
- Deployment of additional staff and materials to deliver this work in the field.

Jewish Federations also joined 177 organizations in signing this letter to the U.S. Government requesting an immediate 18-month designation of Temporary Protected Status for Ukrainians currently in the U.S. so they may not need to return to Ukraine during the violence and evolving humanitarian crisis.

JFNA will hold a briefing on March 9th at 12pm ET that will deliver an update on the latest developments in the war in Ukraine and the Ukrainian Jewish community. Click here to register.

JFNA and UJA-Federation of New York also held a webinar on Tuesday that brought voices from the field representing NSCEJ, JDC and the Jewish Agency. Speakers shared updates on the heartbreaking reality of living through a war and the heroic humanitarian efforts Federations are supporting. The recording can be viewed here.

The Jewish Agency for Israel has received some 5,000 requests to immigrate to Israel in recent days, and believes that up to 10,000 Ukrainian immigrants could arrive in Israel in the near future, in what would only be the first wave of refugees headed to the Jewish state.

Since opening an emergency hotline last Thursday, the Agency has received more than 8,000 calls, 5,000 of which were by people inquiring about the possibility of moving to Israel. The Agency has sent an additional 18 shlichim to the Polish, Hungarian, Moldovan and Romanian borders to assist Jewish refugees who want to move to Israel, and is looking to double that number in the immediate future. While the Agency is working with the Israeli government to provide visas for those who want to make Aliya, a spokesperson said that “at this stage it doesn’t matter” if refugees fleeing the fighting are interested in immigrating to Israel, “they are Jews. Even if they want to stay, we provide help.”

See here for a video of a father and son who drove for four days to escape the war, being reunited with their mother, Masha, just over the Ukrainian border with Hungry.

The Agency is holding some 2,000 beds in hotels and other facilities in countries neighboring Ukraine, and more than 700 of these are already occupied. Yesterday, an estimated 1,000 people left Kiev and Kharkiv headed for Agency facilities across the border, so the organization is looking to double the number of people it can temporarily house.

Despite the surge in Aliyah requests, the majority of the Jewish community is still in Ukraine, living under fire. Many fear the dangerous journey to the border, and some families do not want to leave Ukraine until their men are permitted to leave as well. For now, males of “fighting age” (aged 18-60) are not permitted to leave the country.

There has also been a spike in interest in Aliyah from Russian Jews, as the effects of the war are felt there as well.

Over 300 of the olim who have fled Ukraine will arrive in Israel on Sunday, March 6 and will be met by Minister of Aliyah and Integration Pnina Tamano-Shata and others. The Ukrainian Jewish refugees will arrive on three separate flights from Warsaw, Moldova and Romania. The Romanian flight which will depart from Iași, will be carrying 100 Jewish orphans, among the olim. The new immigrants will be provided with extended benefits packages and will be transferred to temporary housing in hotels across the country.

In addition to its emergency Aliya work, the Agency has also opened up a $1.5 million security fund to bolster the resilience of Ukrainian communities in case of looting or vandalism.

For more information about the work of the Jewish Agency in the Ukraine crisis, including moving stories, see here.

The **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)** reports that, so far they have not received any reports of death or injury from their Hesed welfare centers across Ukraine, although there have been reports of damage to the homes of some welfare recipients. At the same time, JDC's homecare services continue in some locations to all recipients, and in other locations, where shelling is harsh, only to the most vulnerable. Just as conditions become more difficult, stores have closed and residents' supplies are running out.

JDC's emergency hotline for incoming calls from Ukraine is now staffed by hundreds of Russian and Ukrainian speaking volunteers in Israel as the volume of calls increases dramatically. In addition, JDC's Kishinev Volunteer Center in Moldova is placing outgoing calls to check on vulnerable JDC welfare recipients in Ukraine.

Hundreds of refugees have been evacuated with JDC help, and the organization is hoping to evacuate many more in the coming days. However, much of the public transportation system in Ukraine has shut down. In large cities such as Kharkiv, Dnipro and Lviv, some trains are still operating, but many are finding it difficult to get to stations due to constant curfews and fighting. To help those trying to leave Ukraine, JDC has established an evacuation hotline which began operating yesterday (Wednesday). Additional emergency hotlines are operated by JDC's local community partners in Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia to answer questions and direct any individuals looking to learn more about where they can go and what support they can receive in these communities.

In coordination with the local Jewish communities of Hungary, Poland, Romania and Moldova, JDC staff, community partners and volunteer teams are welcoming and caring for those who are crossing the border and preparing for future needs.

World ORT oversees a network of five schools in Ukraine, with more than 8,000 students, teachers, staff, and their families. Jewish Federation support will provide immediate emergency items including food with a long shelf-life, water, matches and lighters, batteries and portable chargers, bio-toilets, LED torches and walkie-talkies, first aid kits, and essential medicines.

United Hatzalah is using its grant from Federations to help fund a specially chartered plane carrying 15 tons of medical supplies, food, humanitarian aid, for all Ukrainian refugees at the Moldova border. The plane will also be bringing an additional 40 medical personnel, EMTs, paramedics, doctors, psychologists, and therapists, to join the organization's 15 volunteers already on the ground. See here for more.

Tens of Israeli and **Jewish organizations** are working to provide humanitarian relief for Ukraine. JFNA has put together a summary of these efforts, which can be found here.

Jewish Federations have activated our emergency protocols and are working closely with the Government of Israel and our partners to do everything in our power to support efforts that ensure the safety and well-being of the entire Jewish community in Ukraine.

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