

**Sent:** Monday, March 28, 2022

**Subject:** Update on the Situation in Ukraine from the CEO and Director General



**Dear friends,**

Earlier this week, we hosted a special Zoom meeting for members of the Board of Governors to update on The Jewish Agency for Israel's response to the war in Ukraine. As always, I firstly want to thank our generous partners for their commitment to support our life saving work since the outbreak of the war. We were honored to hear from Mark Wilf and Eric Fingerhut from JFNA as well as Sam Grundweg from Keren Hayesod.

Our ability to respond in times of crisis like this is only possible because of your partnership. Your immediate support is a testament that the Jewish collective will not turn away even one Jew because of a lack of resources.

We are now in our fourth week of this war. The situation is very exhausting, but it directly highlights the privilege and responsibility we have to save lives.

**[Click here to visit our website and see a video highlighting our work on the borders thus far.](#)**

The scale and complexity of this operation is unlike anything we've ever encountered. We continue to operate 18 facilities at 5 different border crossings with thousands of refugees, many of whom will make Aliyah. Some have come on the almost 300 buses we've coordinated with the local communities; some have come on trains by themselves; and most arrive with just the clothes on their backs. They all come with unique needs, and we are adapting our response to each and every one of them.

Mainly, we are looking to provide the support and optimism they need to feel safe and prepared to come to Israel.

Last week, we made a huge breakthrough with the Government of Israel with a new initiative called "Aliyah Express." We're now able to implement an expedited process that will shorten the stay in our facilities and help attain approvals to board a plane to Israel more quickly .

So far, 7,000 Ukrainian Jews have come to Israel as olim or as eligible to make Aliyah. Just this week, we are expecting at least another 1,000 to arrive – bringing us over a total of 8,000 olim. As our operations continue, we expect this number to reach 10,000 *olim* (immigrants) in the next two weeks, with an additional 5,000 more in the near future. **This is five times more the annual number of olim from Ukraine in all of last year.**

These figures don't include those from Russia, Belarus and the rest of the former Soviet Union. It's important to note that the tension and anxiety in these places is increasing dramatically. We've received an equal number of calls to our emergency hotline – almost 30,000 – from these countries as well. 8,000 of them are interested in beginning the Aliyah process immediately. **From this volume of inquiries, we estimate 25,000 olim will come from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and other countries in the region.**

In the past couple of weeks, The Jewish Agency established a command center in order to holistically manage and adapt our operations around this crisis – from the stage of rescuing those seeking refuge in our transit centers and completing the process of obtaining aliyah permits to boarding a flight to Israel. More than 100 employees and volunteers have been sent to the field for various missions, including employees of subsidiaries, retirees, and returning Shlichim. Those who are sent to the field go through a workshop of mental preparation offered by our Human Resources Unit, and upon return to Israel, are gathered together to process the experience. This is an opportunity to express my appreciation to all those who are taking part in our organizational efforts during such an emergency. Through this exciting mobilization, we are able to meet the needs on the ground.

Aside from our work implementing "Aliyah Express," it is clear to us that another major focus needs to be on the long-term integration into Israel for these olim. This will be an enormous national effort, together with the Ministry of Aliyah and Absorption, in providing the most basic essentials for them to housing, employment, financial assistance, learning Hebrew and more, so they begin their new lives strong. We're also aware of the post-trauma and psychological support that will be needed to support these new Israelis through a devastating time in their lives and an acute displacement and acclimation.

I'm grateful to the Government of Israel, which in recent weeks has been promoting an integrative and holistic national effort to assist in bringing and absorbing this new wave of olim, with the understanding of the complex challenge facing the State of Israel and its strategic national importance. We regularly attend all emergency forums of the relevant ministries and governmental departments. The Prime Minister appointed a national project manager to lead the Government of Israel's response to the Ukraine crisis, who immediately identified The Jewish Agency as a key platform for carrying out government efforts, together with the other organizations operating on the ground, in the countries surrounding Ukraine. This is a testament to the great confidence in our ability to implement rescue operations at the highest level.

I also want to update you on a special program we have developed, together with Masa Israel Journey and the Government of Israel, which will immediately work to bring up to 3,000 young Jews from the Former Soviet Union to Israel for a range of various six-months programs. We have just recently started a campaign, and we've already received over 1,500 new leads of interested participants and a few hundred already

enrolled— many of whom have never been to Israel before. We've recruited and increased our staff in the surrounding countries to help with recruitment, as well as our staff in Israel who will run the programs throughout the country. This will provide a significant response to rescuing the younger generation and continuing to strengthen their relationship to Israel and their Jewish identity.

During the call, we also heard two personal stories from the field – Roman Polonsky, Regional Director for the former Soviet Union, Germany, Central & Eastern Europe, and Valentina Homenko, Director of Young Aliyah Programs who spent two weeks in Romania opening our operations on the ground.

I'd be remiss to speak about our achievements without facing the challenges we foresee. We expect inevitable bumps along the way, but we'll work carefully and responsibly to find the best solutions. We're now facing rising costs to operate our facilities on the ground as well as increased expenses for accommodations for the refugees, transportation, security and flights. And it's been hard to keep up with the demand for seats on the planes to Israel. Rest assured, we'll soon have planes waiting for olim, not olim waiting for planes.

Our evolving needs have been supported in an unprecedented way by our partners, and I want to take this opportunity once again to share our gratitude to the Jewish Federations of North America, Keren Hayesod, Christian Friends of Israel and the many private foundations and individual donors. Because of you, we've been able to think strategically about how to address the huge increase in Aliyah we anticipate. Make no mistake though. While it's our moral responsibility to care for Jewish Ukrainian refugees, these olim will prove to be a strategic asset to Israeli society in coming years.

I also want to be very clear about the upcoming Aliyah from Ethiopia. One of the unique aspects of our organization is our ability to simultaneously manage enormous tasks at any given moment. Our moral responsibility to save and provide a safe place for every Jew holds true regardless of how those needs are spread across the world. We are committed to implementing the Government of Israel's decision and timetable on Aliyah from Ethiopia no less than assisting those fleeing Ukraine. We've already reinforced our teams and work on the ground there and have expanded our absorption capacity in Israel.

We are now preparing for the upcoming Passover holiday – that for many will be their own version of a modern day exile from Egypt. No one will be left alone on this central Jewish holiday, and we are working together with the Ministry of Aliyah and Absorption in Israel to assist in the Passover Seders in the hotels as well as Seders in our facilities in the field.

If there's one thing I've been consistently feeling over the past few weeks, it's pride. I'm proud of what our teams have accomplished on the ground and in Israel, with everyone stepping in to work around the clock to address the myriad of urgent demands. The situation continues to stretch our abilities, and we continue to meet the needs without a moment's delay.

I am also proud of what we as the Jewish collective have achieved already, and what we'll take on together going forward. The last few weeks have been a testament of what "mutual responsibility" truly looks like, and I hope you all feel pride in being a part of the

Jewish people. I hope you will take this opportunity to share this pride with your wider social circles and network and encourage them too to join us in this mission.

**Yours truly,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amira', written in a cursive style.

**Amira**