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**AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE (JDC) PROVIDES
LIFELINE TO MORE THAN 170,000 ELDERLY JEWS IN FORMER SOVIET UNION**

- Among the Poorest Jews in the World -

NEW YORK, NEW YORK March 9, 2009 - From St. Petersburg, Russia to Siberia, from Kiev, Ukraine to Kazakhstan, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) provides relief to more than 170,000 destitute elderly Jews in over 2,900 cities, towns, and villages across the vast cultural and geographic expanse of the republics that comprise the former Soviet Union (FSU). A network of more than 175 JDC-supported *Hesed* welfare centers and other Jewish organizations offers vital services to ease the burden of the destitute Jewish elderly living in the region's bitter cold. Every day, homecare for the elderly, as well as thousands of blankets, boots, warm jackets, and gallons of heating fuel oil are being provided for the neediest clients.

"If it had not been for *Hesed* four years ago, I would not have survived. If I did not have *Hesed* now, I would have to go out myself and beg," says Valentina in Odessa, Ukraine. Born in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia in 1931, she studied in Moldova and devoted her life to education. Now sick, devastatingly poor, and without family to care for her, she lives alone in a run-down, one-room apartment in Odessa. Struggling to get by on a meager pension, she was bed-ridden from medical conditions including heart disease, cancer, and glaucoma. Desperate for food and medicine, JDC provided emergency assistance, food, medications, and home care.

Valentina is one of more than 170,000 impoverished elderly Jews helped by JDC (all figures as of December 2007). Fewer than 98,000 of these seniors qualify for restitution-funded assistance. Vital services for the remaining 72,000 seniors depend entirely on funding from North American Federations and others. JDC provides critical services including home care, food, medical care, winter relief and a warm homes volunteer project where groups gather to discuss Jewish topics and care for the elderly's feelings of isolation and loneliness.

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Media Alert

After seven decades of Communist repression and Nazi terror, and amid the financial hardship that followed the Soviet regime's collapse, JDC has facilitated the rebirth of strong, self-determining Jewish communities. Day by day, Jews in the FSU are reinventing Jewish life that is grounded in both material security and a vibrant Jewish identity. With the support of North American Jewish communities and global funding partners, JDC is tackling the realities of providing significant welfare services within the current global economic climate.

"When seniors are faced with greatly diminished pensions and other social benefits, their dilemma is choosing between medications and food. Due to the rising cost of goods, and rampant inflation in the former Soviet Union, we are presented with major challenges in addressing the plight of the elderly," said Steve Schwager, Chief Executive Officer, JDC.

"JDC cares for Jews who have no other safety net and those who are otherwise unable to obtain basic necessities," he said. "In the face of economic realities, we will continue to provide welfare services to the poor, develop local collective responsibility, and support strong caring communities, while continuing to seek much-needed additional funds."

In the former Soviet Union, in addition to services to elderly Jews, critical nutritional, medical and other assistance is provided to 28,000 children at risk and their families through the IFCJ-JDC Partnership for Children. The humanitarian aid organization also helps Jews reclaim their heritage and build self-sufficient Jewish life through libraries, Hillel Centers, family retreats and Jewish education. It offers training in practical skills of welfare and community work, leadership and management, academic expertise, and economic self-sufficiency to enhance communities' independence.

Since 1914, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) has given global expression to the principles that all Jews are responsible for one another. Working today in over 70 countries, JDC acts on behalf of North America's Jewish communities and others to rescue Jews in danger, provide relief to those in distress, revitalize overseas Jewish communities and help Israel overcome the social challenges of its most vulnerable citizens. JDC also provides non-sectarian emergency relief and long-term development assistance worldwide. For more information, please visit www.JDC.org.

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