



NEWS from

Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews

UPDATE REPORT

During the past 18 months Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews has monitored changes within the former Soviet Union from data collected and made available to us by travelers' experiences, emigre information, experts' analysis and direct phone contacts with a network of Jews still living there.

There is political instability throughout the area. No one knows who will control the nation, what that nation will look like or how all this will affect the Jews.

Everywhere conditions are deteriorating.

Food supplies and prices vary from place to place daily. Wage-earners can only afford to buy basic food with their salaries. Clothing and other essentials are out of reach. Medicine is largely unavailable; even aspirin.

Anti-Semitism is growing, fed by the general uncertainty.

Right-wing fundamentalist or fascist groups seek to further their own agenda by scapegoating Jews. Pamyat (a nationalistic organization) still claims Jews are responsible for the Bolshevik Revolution, the collapse of the economy and the AIDS epidemic. In Tadzhikistan, fundamentalist Moslems call on the local population to free and purify itself from Jews, Russians and other non-Moslems.

Many people are terrified.

The ruble is worth less than a penny and the elderly must somehow subsist on 300 to 400 rubles a month. Savings have been wiped out.

This winter elderly pensioners in Kharkov received their pensions in hundred ruble notes because the government had printed too many. There were not enough small bills to make change, so people could not spend their monthly allotment. One old woman was unable to buy any food for three days while she went from store to store in a futile attempt to change her hundred ruble bill.

The system is in chaos.

In 1991 CCSJ supplemented the meager government pensions of 70 households with donations received from supporters. We sent food parcels to several families in our Sister City, Kharkov. There are few agencies or programs in place to help the elderly and sick; everyone is having a difficult time. We desperately need to do even more.