



Russian Jewish Congress

WJC - Russian Federation

Activity Report

November 2022 - March 2023

The situation in the regions

According to various sources, about 100,000 Jews left Russia in 2022 - for Israel and other countries. Some of them returned later, some are visiting Russia regularly and leaving back.

At the same time, in almost all regions of the country, an increase in demand for participation in Jewish life is noted, in some cities the number of children in Sunday schools has also increased.

Many regions note an increased demand for giyur, including among the fourth generation of Jews.

Some regions report the departure of community and organization staff. Some community leaders and university professors left Moscow and St. Petersburg. In this regard, difficulties arose in building the educational program at Moscow State University, St. Petersburg State University. Also, the directors of the Hillel representative offices in Moscow and St. Petersburg left the country (but new directors were appointed in their places). Reports are coming in about the departure of rabbis as well.

The main concern of the regional Jewish communities is the departure of the trustees from the country and their loss of interest in supporting Jewish life in Russia. At the end of 2022, the situation differed from region to region, and if in some regions we observed a significant drop in donations, then in others we saw an increase. As of Q1 2023, many regions are reporting a reduction in trustee funding.

Antisemitism

We continue to monitor all manifestations of anti-Semitism in Russia in daily media monitoring.

According to the 2022 Anti-Semitism Monitoring Report, the level of anti-Semitic violence has not changed and has remained low. But there are more manifestations of anti-Semitism in the media space, the reason for their appearance was the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Moreover, well-known public figures, including those occupying a high position in politics, allowed themselves such statements. And although in most such cases their statements received a proper public and administrative response, the very increase in the presence of anti-Semitism in the media space cannot but cause concern. The trend we noted in previous years towards the “instrumentalization” of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism continued: in 2022 and early 2023, public figures often made inappropriate comparisons with the Holocaust of the world community’s reaction to Russia’s actions and the sanctions imposed on it.

A difficult moment now is the rhetoric of state leaders, for example, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Throughout 2022 and again in 2023, he spoke about the current political situation, comparing it with the Holocaust and Jewish history during the Second World War.

Such rhetoric is also actively used by journalists, for example, Vladimir Solovyov in February explained his inclusion in the EU sanctions list by his Jewish origin.

On January 20, 2023, V. Putin signed a decree on the dismissal of Alexei Pavlov from the post of Assistant Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation. Recall that in October 2022, Pavlov published a column in Arguments and Facts, where he called the Chabad Lubavitch movement a sect. The RJC promptly sent relevant letters to law enforcement agencies with a request to verify this statement. This was followed by an apology for the words of his assistant to the head of the Security Council N. Patrushev.

However, among fringe movements, this rhetoric is gaining momentum. For example, on February 21, 2023, activists of the All-People's Union for the Revival of Russia, a follower of Svetlana Peunova, turned to the Governor of the Kemerovo Region, Sergei Tsivilev, with a demand to check the activities of the Chabad movement and recognize it as undesirable on the territory of Russia, to recognize Rabbi Menachem Mendl Rabinovich as a foreign agent, and to recognize the fundamental book Hasidim "Tania" should be banned as extremist literature, and all officials who "are conductors of the will and ideology of Chabad" should be removed from office.

Similar appeals to the governors were made by activists in three more regions - in Tatarstan, Bashkiria and the Tyumen region.

Jewish organizations

XI Congress of the All-Russian Public Organization "Russian Jewish Congress"

On December 11, 2022, the XI Congress of the All-Russian Public Organization "Russian Jewish Congress" (RJC) was held in Moscow, bringing together 314 representatives of Jewish organizations and 29 Jewish organizations from 49 regions of Russia. The most important decisions of the Congress were personnel decisions, which testify to the success of the organization over the past four years. President of the Russian Jewish Congress LLC Yuri Kanner and Executive Vice President Anna Bokshitskaya were unanimously re-elected for a new term until 2026. The main activities of the RJC are the development and support of Jewish communities, the fight against xenophobia and anti-Semitism, the preservation of the memory of the Holocaust, Jewish education and public diplomacy. In all these areas, the RJC supports the diversity of pluralistic Jewish life in Russia and remains the largest secular umbrella organization in the country.

At this event, RJC presented its new project - an educational program for children from socially vulnerable families. This program will help hundreds of children improve their quality of life. RJC conducts online classes in the most important subjects for exams. To inspire the children, the project will start with a one-week educational camp in Moscow. Each participant will receive their own personal computer - to be able to study online, since most of these children do not have computers at home or only have one computer that is occupied by the rest of the family.

On the sidelines of the congress, working meetings of directors of Heseds from all over the country were held.

Internet project "Jewish Life" (www.JewLife.ru)

The new reality has created new problems in the way of the exchange and dissemination of information. The answer to it was a special project of the RJC - the Internet portal "Jewish Life". He publishes materials on the web, on Telegram and on Yandex Zen (Yandex's very popular social network).

Thanks to this portal, Jewish organizations can report on their events, services and news, and people with Jewish roots can learn about Jewish history, traditions, as well as all Jewish activities in their region.

In March 2023, RJC, with the support of the Israeli Embassy in Russia, launched a competition for the best video congratulations on Israel's 75th anniversary. The winners will receive cash prizes and be honored at a gala reception at the Israeli Embassy in Moscow.

Memory of the Holocaust

"Holocaust Victims Memory Week" is a series of memorial and educational events dedicated to the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust (January 27). This year's "Holocaust Victims Memory Week" was held from 16 to 31 January. It was organized by the Russian Jewish Congress with the support of the Federal Agency for Nationalities of the Russian Federation, the Government of Moscow, the Holocaust Center, the Israeli Embassy in the Russian Federation and the Israeli Cultural Center "Nativ".

The main event of the "Holocaust Victims Memory Week" is the annual ceremony of the Russian Jewish Congress "Keeper of Memory". The winners of this award for 2023 are Oleg Mortkovich, Chairman of the Moscow Organization of Jews - former prisoners of the ghettos and Nazi concentration camps; Alexey Shaposhnikov, Chairman of the Moscow City Duma; Aron Mardakhaev is President of the Charitable Foundation for Social Development "Regional Jewish Congress of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts" and Yael Ioffe is Chairman of the Board of the Volgograd Jewish Community Center. This award for a special contribution to the preservation of the memory of the Holocaust was presented at the "Keeper of Memory" evening for the fifth year in a row. This year the ceremony was held on January 26 in one of the largest theaters in Moscow, the Musical Theater of Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko. The evening was attended by the Ambassadors of 20 states.

At the "Keeper of Memory" evening, a campaign was launched to collect donations for the purchase of medicines and medical services for members of the Moscow public organization of Jews - former prisoners of the ghettos and Nazi concentration camps, headed by Oleg Mortkovich. Today, only 113 people remain in this organization.

On January 27, a historical and documentary exhibition "The Holocaust: Destruction, Resistance, Salvation" was opened in the Moscow City Duma, prepared by the Holocaust Center with the participation of the Russian Jewish Congress. The exhibition is based on the personal stories of witnesses of the Holocaust - the dead, the rescued, soldiers, doctors. "The Holocaust is the genocide of the Jewish people, during which at least six million Jews were killed," recalled Anna Bokshitskaya, executive director of the RJC, at the opening. "Today it is important to declare the inadmissibility of blurring the concept of the Holocaust, when quite often any negative event is called the Holocaust — not just compared, but even identified with it, this is speculation on the pain of the Holocaust. This is not only an insult to the memory of the six million dead Jews, but also a devaluation of the global tragedy that has occurred and the feat of the Righteous Among the Nations."

On January 25, in Moscow, in the House of the Peoples of Russia, an event was held with the support of the Israeli Embassy. At the evening, "Israeli Readings" were held - poems and prose passages in Hebrew and Russian, to the accompaniment of the violin, were read by the Ambassador of the State of Israel to the Russian Federation, famous Russian actors. Then an animated documentary film about the Minsk ghetto "263 Nights" was shown, a joint project of Russia, Belarus and Israel.

On January 24, a concert in memory of the victims of the Holocaust took place, in which leading instrumental musicians and famous Russian actors took part. The opening speech was made by the Deputy Executive Director of RJC Lyubov Kon. The participants of the evening read poetry and prose, played works by Maurice Ravel, Sergei Prokofiev, Ernest Bloch, Paul Schoenfeld, in which these composers used Jewish folk melodies.

On January 22, a special screening of the performance "Cabaret Terezin" was held at the Moscow Central House of Actors. With this production, the Moscow program of the "Holocaust Victims Memory Week 2023" began. The performance was based on musical and text works created in 1942-1944 by prisoners of the Nazi concentration camp Theresienstadt. The project was implemented with the financial support of a member of the Bureau of the Presidium of the RJC, RJC Consul for Anti-Semitism Viktor Vekselberg.

On January 24-28, two international conferences "The Holocaust: Remembrance and Prevention" were held for schoolchildren and students. They are organized annually by the Holocaust Center and the International Research and Educational Center for the History of the Holocaust and Genocides of the Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH). The reports of the young participants of the conferences were devoted to Nazi propaganda, the liberation of Auschwitz, the historiography of the Holocaust and its reflection in cinema, memorialization and culture of memory, understanding the Holocaust in different countries, the fate of specific people - the victims of the Holocaust and the Righteous Among the Nations.

One of the final events of the "Holocaust Victims Memory Week 2023" was the online laboratory "Regain Dignity" on January 28-29. This mini-course of lectures on the study and preservation of the historical memory of the Holocaust introduced you to the skills of working with archival documents and helped you learn more about your ancestors who suffered in the Holocaust. Today, many are trying to restore the history of their family, to learn about the fate of relatives who died during the Holocaust, and about the history of the town in which they lived. But it is often difficult to find such information. Helping to cope with these difficulties is the main practical task of the online laboratory.

The official program of the "Holocaust Victims Memory Week 2023" includes about a thousand cultural, educational and memorial events in 85 regions of Russia. Among them are the annual prayer marathon in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, held in hundreds of evangelical communities across the country (organized by the Working Group for Judeo-Christian Dialogue in Russia) and the poster exhibition "Butterfly. Children of the Holocaust" in Yekaterinburg, dedicated to 1.5 million children who died in the Holocaust, an evening in memory of the victims of the Holocaust in Novosibirsk and a musical memorial evening "We Remember" in Ulyanovsk, a concert "In Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust" in the Irkutsk Regional Philharmonic and an evening-requiem in memory of the victims of the Holocaust in the Tomsk Choral Synagogue, an action of memory at the Holocaust Memorial in Bryansk and mourning rallies in Zmievskaia Balka in Rostov-on-Don, at the Wall of Remembrance for the victims of executions in Kislovodsk, at the memorial sign for the victims of the Holocaust in Volgograd and in many other cities. The full program of events both in Moscow and in the regions is published on the website www.memoryweek.ru.

The international cooperation

We maintain regular contacts with Embassies of different countries in Moscow.

In particular, over the past period, meetings were held with Ivana Norsik, Deputy Ambassador of the European Union, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, Portugal, Israel and many others.

The RJC also continues to cooperate and communicate both with the largest Jewish organizations and with representatives of different countries to combat anti-Semitism. Among them, Yuri Kanner, President of RJC, met with Ms. Deborah Lipstadt in Washington.

In early February, RJC Executive Director Anna Bokshitskaya took part in a conference on combating anti-Semitism in the OSCE region, held in Skopje (North Macedonia). She presented a report on what is happening in the Jewish community of Russia.