

Jewish Agency's COVID-19 Loan Fund for Communities in Crisis Grants Nearly \$10 Million in Aid During Initial Phase As Jewish Casualties Mount to 2,200 (Outside US & FSU)

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Jerusalem – July 8, 2020 – The Jewish Agency for Israel today announced that its COVID-19 Loan Fund for Communities in Crisis, an emergency initiative that helps Jewish institutions around the world bridge immediate gaps in cash flow amid the pandemic, has in its initial phase granted a total of \$9.65 million to 23 communities with urgent needs and as Jewish casualties mount to 2,200 outside the US and FSU.

By granting no-interest loans to organizations providing services essential to the continuing existence of Jewish communities which are now at-risk to survive the COVID-19 crisis, the Loan Fund enables those communities to continue to function, serve their members, and avoid complete collapse.

Launched in April by The Jewish Agency and its partners, Keren Hayesod and Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), the fund has received 80 loan applications from 26 communities, totaling \$22 million in requested assistance. The fund has approved 67 of the loan applications thus far as it continues to process the requests. The aid includes immediate working capital loans of up to \$350,000 to each community or organization, with all recipients located outside North America. Communities receiving the loans have ranged from the large centers of Jewish life in Belgium, France, Italy, South Africa, Spain, and Ukraine to smaller Jewish communities in Austria, Costa Rica, Greece, and Paraguay.

"As Israel has received both emergency and ongoing aid from Jews in North America and worldwide for many years, this crisis represented Israel's golden opportunity to support overseas Jewish communities," Jewish Agency Chairman of the Executive Isaac Herzog said. "This has always been the essence of The Jewish Agency, to serve as a global platform for addressing international crises and galvanizing collective action. At the same time, the COVID-19 Loan Fund for Communities in Crisis represents an unprecedented step for our organization on behalf of the global Jewish people."

The COVID-19 crisis has severely impacted communal life throughout the Jewish world, bringing significant economic distress to many communities who are now on the verge of collapse — including those that were previously financially stable. Many communities are now challenged to finance basic communal services. Educational activities have been discontinued, and essential welfare services are in danger of being closed.

The Jewish Agency is also launching the J-Ready platform, a network based on shared Israeli and international Covid-19 experience, to assist communities around the world - including technological solutions, webinars and consultations with experts in education, medicine, community organization and more.

Press Release

“No International organization has done more for the South African Jewish Community over the past 20 years than the Jewish Agency for Israel. In a crisis they are the first people we call and COVID-19 was no different,” said Avrom Krengel, Honorary President of the South Africa Zionist Federation. “The Jewish Agency responded to every request we made and have helped South African Jewry survive this terrible epidemic and economic catastrophe. We can’t thank them enough.”

The loans are being provided for a duration of four years and can be repaid with no interest at the end of the first year, in four installments. The fund is chaired by leaders from The Jewish Agency’s Board of Governors, Beth Kieffer Leonard and Richard Pearlstone, who are joined by an advisory committee comprised of financial experts from across Europe and South America as well as professionals from the various communities to help assess needs and design appropriate responses.

“The Jewish Agency once again stands alongside the Jewish communities of the Diaspora at the most difficult times such as this crisis. Argentinian Jews never forget it, in the face of the two terrorist attacks in Buenos Aires 1992 and 1994, in the social and political crisis of 2001 and now with COVID-19,” said Rabbi Sergio Bergman, who has recently been appointed President of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, previously he served as Argentina’s Minister of Environment. “The Jewish Agency is our support to overcome the crisis of the present and our school of resilience to together shape the future. We are very grateful to the organization for standing with us side by side, at this time of crisis.”

Further information on applying for the loans can be found at:

<https://www.jewishagency.org/communities-loan-fund/>

Media Contact:

Jake Sharfman, J Cubed Communications

053.340.8526; 347.497.6900

Jake@jcubedpr.com

About The Jewish Agency for Israel

Since 1929, The Jewish Agency for Israel has been working to secure a vibrant Jewish future. It was instrumental in founding and building the State of Israel and continues to serve as the main link between the Jewish state and Jewish communities everywhere. This global partnership has enabled it to address the Jewish People’s greatest challenges in every generation. Today, the Jewish Agency connects the global Jewish family, bringing Jews to Israel, and Israel to Jews, by providing meaningful Israel engagement and facilitating Aliyah. It also strives to build a better society in Israel - and beyond - energizing young Israelis and their worldwide peers to rediscover a collective sense of Jewish purpose. The Jewish Agency continues to be the Jewish world’s first responder, prepared to address emergencies in Israel, and to rescue Jews from countries where they are at risk.