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Soviets 'Will Not Close Our Eyes to Antisemitism'

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**BODY:**

President Mikhail Gorbachev said today that he recognizes antisemitism as a problem in the Soviet Union but does not consider it a "disease that is deep-rooted" in society, according to American Jewish leaders who met with him.

He also accepted a list of 355 Soviet Jews who have not been allowed to emigrate and promised to investigate their cases, according to Shoshana S. Cardin, chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

"I know who you are, I know what your mission is, I am familiar with your concerns," Gorbachev told Cardin and Martin A. Wenick, executive director of the conference, at the start of their 55-minute talk. "And indeed," Cardin said, "he was very familiar" with the issues.

The Kremlin session was the first official meeting between Gorbachev and leaders of the U.S. organization, which has pressed for freer emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union and for freedom of religious life within the country, Cardin said.

The meeting came as the Soviet Union and Israel inaugurated direct flights between Moscow and Tel Aviv, something Israel and the conference have long sought. Until now, although emigration has soared in the past two years, most Jews have had to leave the Soviet Union by train and then fly to Israel.

"This is a very positive step forward in terms of the relationship," conference spokesman Jerry Strober said, "the recognition that Israel has a national airline and that it can come into Moscow, that Aeroflot can fly to Tel Aviv, and that emigrating Jews will be permitted on these flights."

The number of Jews permitted to emigrate from the Soviet Union has increased from 1,140 in 1985, the year Gorbachev came to power, to 186,815 last year, according to the conference. Through August of this year, 124,322 had left, although the numbers have slowed, for reasons that are not clear, since the failure of the coup in August, Gorbachev said in the meeting today.

Cardin said there are about 3 million Jews left in the Soviet Union, more than reported on the official census.

The U.S. leaders in the meeting acknowledged the improvement in emigration and in freedom for synagogues, Hebrew schools and other Jewish institutions "to again develop and, we trust, to continue to flourish and grow," Cardin said.

But she said they also expressed concern about what they view as the rise of antisemitism in this country as nationalist and other groups are freer to express themselves and as the economy worsens. "In our experience, and in the history of this country, when economic upheaval and hardship are experienced people look for reasons and persons and scapegoats,"

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she said. "In the past, it has all too frequently been the Jewish community."

Gorbachev said, "We will not close our eyes to antisemitism," Cardin reported in a news conference. But he declined to issue a public statement condemning antisemitism, which Jewish leaders here and in the United States have long sought, because "he did not feel it would serve anyone's interests to single out anyone," she said.