

Publication: Arutz Sheva (online)  
Date: 06.01.2020  
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## God Nisanov and Zarakh Iliev open Mountain Jews Community Center in Moscow

Timed to coincide with Hanukkah holiday, Association of Mountain Jews inaugurate new community center.

Contact Editor Communicated Content, 08/01/20 21:02



Mountain Jews light Hanukkah menorah in new community center Mountain Jews' Community

The Association of Mountain Jews inaugurated a new [community center](#) in Moscow's Sokolniki Park, timed to coincide with the Hanukkah holiday. This community center, which is the first of its kind in Russia, will serve as a cultural hub that is devoted to the preservation of the Mountain Jews' traditions, heritage, and language. The center will function as a place for religious and cultural studies as well as a venue for celebrating Jewish holidays and for social meetings.

According to the request of two prominent Russian businessmen, [God Nisanov and Zarakh Iliev](#), who serve as the trustees of the Mountain Jews' community, and the STMEGI charity,





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the Moscow municipality agreed to allocate a building in Sokolniki Park that will house the national Mountain Jews Community Center, which is to include a library, synagogue, banquet hall, and several classrooms.

**God Nisanov**, who is one of the principal patrons of the new center, was given the honor of affixing the *mezuzah* to the doorpost at the ribbon-cutting ceremony that was just held. The festive ceremony was also attended by several other dignitaries, including Zarakh Iliev, who co-sponsored the Mountain Jews Community Center along with Nisanov.

The Mountain Jews Community Center will open its doors to the public and will begin to offer services during the course of 2020. While the center was established with the express goal of preserving and celebrating the Mountain Jews' unique traditions, which has been a primary focus of Nisanov and Iliev's charitable work, STMEGI President German Zakharyaeov said at the inauguration ceremony that the center would be open to Jews of all denominations and backgrounds.

Mountain Jews historically hail from areas that are now Dagestan and Azerbaijan. Nisanov and Iliev's affinity for this community and its heritage stems from their own background as natives of Azerbaijan's Jewish community. Members of the Mountain Jewish community have kept their ancient language of Juhuri alive and remain fiercely proud of one another's successes. For example, God Nisanov's election to be vice president of the World Jewish Congress in 2014 was a source of enormous pride for the Mountain Jewish community.

Iliev and Nisanov have directed much of their philanthropic attention to Mountain Jews who have remained in Azerbaijan. In 2017, they launched a project in Krasnaya Sloboda to build the first museum in the world devoted to Mountain Jewish history and cultural heritage. The museum will be housed inside a renovated synagogue and will showcase a large and rare collection of Mountain Jewish artifacts.

Several prominent members of the Jewish community attended the ceremony in Moscow's Sokolniki Park, including Alexander Boroda, the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, Russian Chief Rabbi Berl Lazar, and Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, who is the chief rabbi of Moscow and the chairman of the Council of European Rabbis. The Israeli chargé d'affaires, Yacov Livne, also graced the ceremony with his presence as did Evgeny Eremin, who is the director of the Department for Cooperation with Religious Organizations.

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