Our ninth year, encompassing an intensive program of festivals, conferences, events and exhibitions, has come to a close and we are glad to present in the following pages, this retrospective account of some of the highlights. First and foremost, we would like to welcome to our leadership ranks, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, President of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, who has agreed to serve as dean of Limmud FSU (see “New Faces” on page 16.)

We held nine events in seven different countries which were attended by over 5,000 Russian-speaking Jews. With our tenth anniversary in a year’s time already within our sights, we continue to bring Jewish culture in its widest sense to a generation of (mostly) young people who were deprived for so many years of exposure to Jewish life, culture, education. These are the qualities that we have pledged ourselves to impart to this new generation, together with a spirit of national identity – wherever they may be – not just in the countries of the former Soviet Union, but across the world.

This rich program could not have taken place without the support and backing of many devoted partners, donors and friends, both private and institutional (see page 14).

They have our heartfelt appreciation and thanks.
Another Packed Year

It is with a distinct feeling of pride and achievement that we look back on the previous year’s activities marking nine years since we founded Limmud FSU “on a wing and a prayer,” back in 2006.

In that time, we estimate that about 30,000 young Russian speaking people, overwhelmingly in their 20s to 40s, have been exposed for the first time to their Jewish heritage, which, under 70 years of Communist rule in the USSR, was suppressed or expressly forbidden. Only a handful of brave and devoted individuals were able to teach Hebrew and something of Jewish tradition – many of whom paid for their attempts by long prison sentences.

The world around us has changed radically since then – and the Jewish world together with it. With free immigration from the USSR beginning in the late 1980’s, Russian-speaking Jews have spread across the world (nearly one million to Israel alone), while others choosing to remain in their countries of origin are rebuilding a world of Jewish involvement in their own communities.

We at Limmud FSU are a prime facilitator of all this. Our conferences, festivals and events bring a spirit of intellectual freedom and enquiry to Russian-speakers in a pluralistic, egalitarian, non-demanding atmosphere of study (Limmud) in the broadest sense. Anything “Jewish” is grist to our mill: not just the Bible and Talmud, important as they are, but Jewish history, culture, prose and poetry, theater, dance, music, folklore, the Arab-Jewish conflict, the Middle East, Israeli politics - even Jewish cuisine, and much more.

None of this would be possible without the active involvement of the volunteers who take upon themselves, the planning, programming, recruitment and administration of each event. It is this spirit of volunteerism, which was a guiding principle of the first Limmud in the UK, over 34 years ago, that motivates and drives Limmud FSU. This is even more remarkable inasmuch as the concept of volunteering was virtually unknown in the USSR where the ruling authorities were meant to provide everything.

Nor of course would there be a Limmud FSU without the enthusiastic and devoted support of our donors and sponsors. From the outset they have appreciated the importance of the challenge and rose to it nobly. 30,000 Russian-speaking Jews owe them an enormous vote of appreciation.

The following pages give the highlights of the past year and we enter 2015 – our tenth year! – with great enthusiasm and anticipation. Three new venues will join the Limmud FSU community – Melbourne, Australia, in March, Kazan in the Volga region of Russia in September and in Los Angeles for the US West Coast early in 2016. All that apart from the usual program of ongoing events in the countries of the FSU, Israel, USA and Canada.

We look forward to meeting many of you at a Limmud FSU event during the coming year.
The fifth Limmud FSU event for Russian-speakers to be held in the United States took place at the Sheraton Parsippany Hotel, New Jersey and was attended by 750 participants, mostly aged between 20 and 40, mainly from the greater New York and New Jersey areas. The theme of this year’s event was “Innovation” and many of the nearly 90 sessions, dealt directly or tangentially in innovative thinking, research, business initiatives and technological developments, including a program for children aged three to 12 which also included innovative concepts. Presenters included the popular Israeli writer Lihi Lapid, Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, the entrepreneur Eli Itin of Amdocs, the philanthropist Feliks Frenkel and Adam Schwartz, director of the Technion-Cornell Innovation Institute. Alina Bitel, Chair of Limmud FSU in the USA says, “Limmud FSU New York allows us to write our own story where everything that happens is a reflection of our unique heritage and our passions. It gives us a voice in the very important contemporary American-Jewish dialogue and helps us claim our name and place.”
Limmud FSU, Russia:
Moscow

Moscow was the venue of the first Limmud FSU conference back in 2006 and is still the largest annual event. This year for the ninth conference, 1,150 participants gathered at the Klyazma Retreat Center, some 12 kilometers from the city, and had the choice of a massive 175 sessions, with as many as eight taking place simultaneously, leaving the participant with agonizing decisions on what to see and hear and what had to be missed, delivered by nearly 150 presenters. Among prominent speakers were Prof. Raphael Walden, the chair of “Physicians for Human Rights,” on ethics and medicine in times of conflict, and his wife, Prof. Tzvia Walden (the daughter of then President Shimon Peres), on the psychology of speech, many film presentations followed by discussions, and workshops on music, dance, jewelry-making, baking challot for Shabbat, and much more. A video interview was held with Bel Kaufman, the author and grand-daughter of the famous Yiddish writer Shalom Aleichem — her last interview just three months before her death at the age of 103. A special event and exhibit was held marking the centennial of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Limmud FSU Moldova:
Chişinău

The second Limmud FSU to take place in Moldova, was held at the Chişinău Labor Institute with sponsorship from the Jewish Community of Moldova and the US Embassy. With one of the smallest Jewish communities in Europe, the conference was attended by 350 people who had the choice of 80 different sessions. In a country where the average salary is 50 dollars a month, a decision by so many young Jewish people to invest in a participation fee is clear proof of their desire to draw closer to Judaism and to share in the Jewish dialectic. Chişinău (then Kishinev) is embedded in the Jewish consciousness because of the infamous pogrom of 1903, immortalized in Chaim Nachman Bialik’s iconic poem “City of Slaughter.” Participants heard lectures from academics, journalists, business people from Moldova, Russia and Israel, and had the opportunity of joining workshops on handbag-making, pottery and even the Israeli-invented krav maga system of self-defense. A Limmud volunteer, Yulia Sheinman, says, “Limmud expands your knowledge not just for young people — the elderly also find their place here.”

23-25 May

24-27 April

Limmud FSU Global Leadership
Summit, Jerusalem

This bi-annual gathering of the world Limmud FSU leadership took place at the Jerusalem Gardens Hotel and gathered together some 80 activists and volunteers from nine countries and eleven projects, including from Australia and Canada where Limmud FSU conferences were going to be held for the first time; (Canada, see below; Australia in March 2015.) The packed program included lectures on developing Limmud, courting the media, the new strategic partnership with the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, developing volunteerism and sharing knowledge and know-how with other Limmud FSU teams. The participants visited the Knesset and were addressed by several ministers and Knesset members, including Faina Kirshenbaum, Ronen Hoffman, Elazar Stern, Omer Bar-Lev, Zeev Elkain, Isaac Herzog, and Ronen Plot, Director-General of the Knesset. Some of the participants had the opportunity to attend a concert by Idan Raichel at Massada, others went on guided walking tours of Jerusalem, attended the city’s Festival of Lights and visited the Israel Museum.
The first planning conference for this event which will be held at the Mantra Conference Resort at Lorne on the Great Ocean Road, near Melbourne in March 2015 (see page 2), took place in Melbourne, where the outlines of the forthcoming event – the first in Australia - were drawn up and a project manager, Tania Shvartsman, was appointed (see page 16). The meeting was attended by 25 members of the planning committee chaired by Sasha Klyachinka, with volunteers from the Russian Jewish community and graduates of leadership programs of the Zionist Federation of Australia and the Jewish Agency (“Kangarusski”) and with the participation of Roman Kogan, Executive Director of Limmud FSU. Tania Borodach, a member of the planning team, says, “At Limmud we can be as Jewish as we want and help other connect to their Jewish selves.”

Limmud FSU Belarus: Vitebsk

The second Belarus conference took place in Vitebsk (the previous – first – one in the city had featured the artist Marc Chagall who was born there.) This one was called Arts Limmud and was devoted to a wide range of artistic topics and took place in three venues: the Arts Museum, the Lyalka Theater and the National Academic Theater, with 700 participants. True to its name, many of the 114 sessions were devoted to the arts – literature, poetry, theater and film. Yuri Tabac spoke about Judaism and culture, Tatiana Rudenko gave a master-class on culture and the arts, Mordechai Yushkovsky spoke about Yiddish culture in the USSR, Mark Galesnik spoke about Jewish humor and there were workshops in music and dance. The Israeli television personality and celebrity chef, Gil Hovav, gave a talk about his great-grandfather, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (born in Belarus), who was responsible for the resurrection of Hebrew as a spoken language, and after the conference, a Limmud delegation visited the family home of Ben-Yehuda in Luzhky. A special photographic exhibition on the life of the late Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (whose family came from Belarus) was shown with the participation of Gilad Sharon, younger son of the late prime minister.

Limmud FSU Australia: Melbourne

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Limmud FSU 2014

12-14 September
Limmud FSU Belarus: Vitebsk

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More than 600 people from across Ukraine came to Lviv (Lvov) and filled the city’s Dniester Hotel from wall to wall. The local team had arranged a packed program of 150 sessions. Highlights were a video talk with Krystyna Chiger who spent 14 months concealed with her family in the Lvov sewers during the war and was saved by Leopold Socha, a Ukrainian sewer worker; the Israeli ambassadors to Belarus and Ukraine; Vladimir Bystryakov, a noted composer; the painter Alexander Okun; the actor Victor Shenderovich; the artist Victoria Kovalchuk; and the singer Marina Maximilian, who had the packed crowd raising the rafters at the closing gala party. A Limmud FSU sponsored visit took place to the town of Rivne (Rovno,) where the mother of the celebrated Israeli writer, Amos Oz, was born. There at a special ceremony in the presence of the city’s mayor, Amos Oz’s daughter, Prof. Fania Oz-Salzberger, dedicated a memorial plaque and visited sites associated with the family as lovingly recalled in her father’s, “A Tale of Love and Darkness,” his autobiographical memoir. The story of the visit was extensively covered in the local and Israeli press and television.

Limmud FSU Ukraine:
Lviv

For the first time ever and planned to be an annual event, a Limmud FSU convention was held in Canada with substantial support from the UJA New York Federation. “Kultura Kanada” took place at the Deerhurst resort in Muskoka, Ontario, near Toronto, and was attended by over 500 participants, including the Israeli Minister of Culture and Sport, Limor Livnat. The Honorary Chair was Prof. Irwin Cotler and the whole event was planned and executed by a team of local volunteers. The nearly 100 sessions, most of them on culture-related topics, featured speakers such as Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, the noted British publicist, Melanie Philips, Irwin Cotler on global anti-Semitism; a panel on entrepreneurship; workshops on Jewish cooking, yoga, olive oil, kosher winemaking; lectures on Jewish gangsters in old Odessa; Jewish matchmaking; Canadian Jews – a unique community; the Shiksa; Jewish, Russian and gay; Kabbalat Shabbat and Shaharit morning services. During the course of the conference a special display was shown illustrating the life of the late Prime Minister, Menachem Begin.
With over 800 participants, this event had to suspend registration when it was already oversubscribed shortly after registration opened. The kibbutz guest house was overflowing for the 124 sessions given by over 60 presenters. A central topic was the life and work of Rachel the Poetess who lived and wrote about the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) with which her name is indelibly linked. At a lively opening event, Students of the Beit Zvi Acting Studio in Tel Aviv presented a tribute to many of Rachel’s iconic poems which have been set to music. Popular speakers included Justice of the Supreme Court, Elyakim Rubinstein speaking about the court, Elazar Stern and others on conversion, Avraham Kur, the philologist who explained the meaning of Maoz Zur, the Hanukkah song, Gideon Meir on Israeli diplomacy, the noted Russian writer Alexander Genis on his work, Eli Cohen of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews on Beit Shemesh as a microcosm of immigration, Yoram Dori, advisor to former President Shimon Peres, the historian Uri Millstein taking about his great-aunt Rachel the Poetess, a video interview with the writer Amos Oz by four Israeli journalists following the Limmud FSU visit last month of his daughter, Prof. Fania Oz-Salzberger, to the home of his mother (see Lviv, page 11.)
Limmud FSU Leadership and Staff

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Chair, International Steering Committee
Aaron Frenkel
President
Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein
Dean
Chaim Chesler
Founder, Chair, Executive Committee
Sandra F. Cahn
Co-founder, Chair FRD Committee
Roman Kogan
Executive Director

Chaim Nagus
Finance and Management Consultant
Asher Wolli
English Editor
Yaroslav Brooke
Information and Resources Development
Olga Noa Lavie
Website Administrator, Social Media, PR in Russian
Arik Puder
Public Relations and Press

Regional Leadership
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Chair, Limmud in Ukraine
Raffi Heltzer
Limmud Russian-Speakers, Israel
Yan Biteraer
Project Manager, Israel
(General Logistics Manager Limmud FSU)
Galina Rybnikova
Project Manager, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus
Yenia Nemirovskaya / Tatyana Pashaeva
Project Manager, Russian Federation
Noam Shumakh-Khaimov
Project Manager, USA
Mila Volkanski
Country Director, Canada
Tania Shvartsman
Project Manager, Australia

Without the following friends, partners, donors and associates, Limmud FSU events could not take place. They all have our deepest thanks.

Limmud FSU was established in 2008 in the State of New York as a recognized charity, under the name Limmud FSU International Foundation, Inc.

If you would like to join us or know more about our activities, please contact Sandra Cahn at: sandycahn@aol.com

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www.limmudfsu.co.il

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www.limmud.ru

St. Petersburg
www.limmud.spb.ru

Ukraine
www.limmud.org.ua
(English version: en.limmud.org.ua)

Belarus
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International Fellowship of Christians and Jews
Matthew Bronfman
Aaron Frenkel
Conference for Jewish Material Claims against Germany
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
Diane Wohl
Israel Ministry of Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs
Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Jewish National Fund (KKL)
Prime Minister’s Office – Nativ
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Safar Foundation
Samuel Bronfman Foundation
Shalom Feller
UJA – Federation of Greater Toronto
World Zionist Organization

Limmud FSU Provisional Plans for 2015

Limmud Across the Globe

1. West Coast USA planning seminar: 23-25 January
2. Melbourne, Australia: 8-9 March
4. Moscow: 23-26 April
5. Chişinău (Kishinev), Moldova: 15-17 May
6. Belarus: July
7. Volga Region, Kazan, Russia: 4-6 September
8. Ukraine – 9-12 October
10. St. Petersburg – November
11. Kibbutz Ginosar, Israel – 17-19 December

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Rabbi Yechiel Z. Eckstein

Born in 1951, he received rabbinical ordination from Yeshiva University and is the Founder and President of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. He is the author of seven books on Jewish topics and is recognized as the leading Jewish authority on evangelical Christianity and has written extensively on the subject. He served as an advisor to former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and was appointed Goodwill Ambassador of the State of Israel, with special emphasis on Israel’s relationships with the evangelical communities. He is on the board of directors of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and Dean of Jewish Thought and Studies at Limmud FSU.

Olga Noa Lavie

Was born in Kiev, Ukraine in 1983 and immigrated to Israel in 2005. She is a public relations professional and journalist living in Tel Aviv and has been with Limmud FSU for the last 12 months. She studied journalism, television production and international relations and worked as a radio anchor, correspondent and editor and as an advisor on public relations to several Israeli political figures. She speaks Russian, Ukrainian, Hebrew and English and pronounces herself to be a “passionate Zionist.” Her hobbies are the culinary arts and food photography, fashion, and public diplomacy. At Limmud she is administrator of the new website www.limmudfsu.org and social media, as well as public and press relations in Russian. She replaces Boris Schindler who served for several years as a volunteer and we would like to acknowledge his help and devoted attention.

Tatyana (Tanya) Pashaeva

Was born in 1989 in the small town of Millerovo, in the Rostov region of Russia, and was active in different youth organizations. After graduation she left for Moscow and graduated from the National Research University Higher School of Economics with an MA degree in marketing management and completed a course on project management for non-profit organizations. Five years ago she attended her first Limmud FSU Moscow Conference. She liked it so much that the following year, she became a volunteer and eventually joined the Moscow organizing committee. She enjoys travel, studying foreign languages, reading and listening to music and hates waiting, writing about herself and lazy weekends. Tanya is replacing Jenya Nemirovskaya who is leaving us to raise a family.

Tatiana (Tania) Shvartsman

Was born in Tiraspol, Moldova in 1987 and migrated with her family to Australia in 1992. She has a degree from Deakin University, Melbourne in management, human relations and marketing and speaks English and Russian. In 2010, she went on a Birthright trip to Israel and that is when her Jewish identity took a turn. She worked for the Zionist Federation of Australia and then for the Hagashama project of the Jewish Agency. She is the first Limmud FSU project manager for Australia and says: “My first encounter with Limmud was via the “KangaRusski” Leadership program. As many other Russian Jews in Australia, I had no idea such a thing existed. I believe that Limmud FSU Australia will be the catalyst for the future engagement of the Russian-speaking Jewish community in Australia. This is a huge untapped market, and we are here to make a change!”

NEW FACES