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CONTACT: Jessica Rosenblum,
Rabinowitz/Dorf Communications
(202)265-3000/ jessica@rabinowitz-dorf.com

J Street Names Jewish Community Leader, Washington Insider, Israeli Combat Vet to Head Government Affairs

WASHINGTON—J Street announced today that Hadar Susskind, an IDF special forces veteran and Vice President and Washington Director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), has been appointed Director of Policy and Strategy for the political arm of the pro-Israel, pro-peace movement.

“J Street couldn’t have found a more perfect person to guide our strategic work,” said Jeremy Ben-Ami, Executive Director of J Street. “Hadar combines a deep commitment to Israel, a life-long commitment to Jewish values and significant experience in both the organized Jewish community and Washington politics.

As Director of Policy and Strategy, Susskind will direct J Street’s government affairs team and will oversee the organization’s political and strategic campaigns, which will integrate the lobby’s work with that of the nationwide political action network and the newly established field and grassroots operations. Alongside Dan Kohl, J Street’s political director, Susskind will help to lay the groundwork for JStreetPAC’s work in the 2010 election cycle. In 2008, the legally unconnected PAC kicked off its first election cycle by contributing more money to candidates than any other pro-Israel political action committee.

“My goal is to build as broad a base of support as possible for Israel at this politically pivotal moment when there is both great opportunity to make progress in resolving the conflict and a tremendous risk of squandering it,” said Susskind. “I look forward to working to grow a strong and integrated progressive pro-Israel movement and to build that much needed support across the spectrum of American political life.”

As Washington director for JCPA, Susskind advocated for the collective legislative agenda of 125 local Jewish Community Relations Councils across the country and 14 national agencies on a range of domestic and foreign policy issues, including Israel. He played a key role in communicating what comes out of Washington to the organized Jewish community, and the needs and positions of the community back to political leaders and policy makers in Washington.

Susskind, who holds the IDF rank of sergeant first class, was decorated for his service in combat as an infantry soldier in Lebanon. He was born in Israel and has lived there for over a decade throughout his life.

Before joining the JCPA, Susskind was the Washington representative for the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), where he determined COEJL's public policy agenda, represented COEJL on Capitol Hill and to the administration, raised the level of environmental awareness and activism within the Jewish community and built interfaith coalitions to address environmental issues. Susskind also served as assistant director of the Washington Office of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and worked earlier in his career in the Washington office of the Israel Policy Forum.

"As someone who knows and cares deeply for Israel, I recognize the toll that the persistent conflict exacts on its citizens, soldiers and supporters," said Susskind. "I look forward to working towards the day when Israel will know true peace and security, and I believe deeply that only a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict can bring that about."

J Street also announced today that Dylan Williams, Senator Olympia Snowe's (R-ME) counsel for foreign relations, trade and immigration, has been appointed deputy director of J Street's government affairs department, bringing the legislative team's total to four. The team is expected to grow to six in early 2010.

J Street continues to expand significantly on all fronts. It recently announced the addition of three regional coordinators to its roster. The coordinators-- based in New York, Chicago and Seattle, respectively-- will work community-by-community to build a nationwide political action network comprised of major donors and activists who will drive J Street's lobbying and advocacy operations. The news comes on the heels of J Street's decision to merge with the Union of Progressive Zionists to form J Street U, the movement's student arm, and to establish an independent field and grassroots operation.

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