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Contact:
Randi Levinas, Executive Director
Coalition for U.S.-Russia Trade
Phone: (202) 739-9196
levinas@usrbc.org

Business Coalition Urges Legislation to Keep U.S. Firms Competitive in Russia's Growing Market

March 14, 2012 (Washington, DC) – The U.S. business community, organized under the umbrella of the Coalition for U.S.-Russia Trade (www.usrussiatrade.org) – a broad-based grouping of more than 150 U.S. corporations, trade associations and small businesses active in trade with Russia – today released a letter urging the U.S. Congress to take action on legislation to ensure that U.S. manufacturers, farmers and service providers can continue to increase their exports and maintain their international competitiveness by accessing commercial opportunities in the Russian market. The letter defines the necessary legislation – action on Russia's graduation from the Jackson-Vanik amendment and Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) with Russia -- as "the top trade priority on the U.S. business community's legislative agenda this year." Russia will join the World Trade Organization (WTO) by mid-summer, and U.S. congressional action is essential to ensure that U.S. firms can benefit from Russia's WTO commitments.

Russia is the world's 11th largest market, and the combination of its growing middle class, industries seeking to modernize and outdated infrastructure all point to opportunities for U.S. firms. "Russia made significant market-opening and trade-liberalizing commitments as part of its WTO accession. These commitments are legally binding under WTO rules. Additionally, the transparency provisions of Russia's WTO accession will likely help improve the business environment in Russia. Only with PNTR in place can U.S. firms access all of Russia's WTO commitments," said Randi Levinas, Executive Director of the Coalition for U.S.-Russia Trade and Executive Vice President of the U.S.-Russia Business Council (www.usrbc.org).

However, at present, the United States' trade relationship with Russia is tied to a provision of U.S. trade law (the Jackson-Vanik amendment) enacted in the 1970s to condition normal trade relations (NTR) status on the then-Soviet Union's willingness to let Jews emigrate freely. That law has long since fulfilled its purpose: each year since 1994, consecutive U.S. Administrations – both Republican and Democrat – have found Russia in compliance with Jackson-Vanik. Nevertheless, to fully access Russia's WTO commitments, the U.S. Congress must graduate Russia from the amendment and make Russia's NTR status permanent.

"We do not make one concession to Russia in granting PNTR," added Levinas. "PNTR is only about benefits for U.S. firms, farmers and workers. It's about having the opportunity to access a growing market and the ability to share U.S. values through our best business practices."

The Coalition for U.S.-Russia Trade, housed at the U.S.-Russia Business Council, is committed to strengthening U.S.-Russian commercial ties and preserving the competitiveness of U.S. firms, farmers and workers in the Russian market. For more information, please visit the Coalition website at www.usrussiatrade.org.

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