

The Honorable Mike Pompeo Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street NW Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

For over two hundred years, as many as 30,000 members of the Jewish community from around the world make an annual pilgrimage to the city of Uman, Ukraine to spend the Jewish New Year praying at the gravesite of their revered teacher, Rabbi Nachman of Uman. This year, the Ukrainian government limited the number of people that can safely come to pray due to concerns about the novel coronavirus. This past week, the Ukrainian government closed its borders to most foreigners from August 29 to September 28, 2020, which will make it impossible for those outside the country to participate in the religious pilgrimage this year.

We respectfully write to you to consider advocating on behalf a group of American citizens whom find this annual pilgrimage extremely important.

The ruling to close the Ukrainian border has at least a dozen published exceptions, including allowing students, diplomats, and cultural figures to arrive by invitation. The Ukrainian government could add a limited religious exception allowing for a small fraction of the regular attendees (not to exceed 2000 people) to enter the country for a total of five days. All members of the group would be tested upon arrival at their own expense and would agree to follow all medical safety and security precautions and protocols at all times. This includes remaining in quarantine apart from the local population.

We respectfully ask that you consider this request given the wonderful relationship between the United States, Ukraine, and our Jewish communities. We believe that this limited exception, with all associated caveats, could make sure that a time-honored religious practice is continued safely.