

Jerusalem, August 20th 2020

Mr. Volodymyr Zelensky

President of Ukraine

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing to you as the State of Israel's Government head of the task force to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. I would like to share my concerns with you ahead of the expected travel of thousands of Israelis from the Jewish ultraorthodox community, planning to visit Uman, in the Cherkasy Oblast, for the annual pilgrimage to the tomb of Rebbe Nachman.

As you may be aware, Israel is still dealing with relatively high daily rates of infected people with the coronavirus. In spite of the severe measures that are being taken by the government, the infection rates remain high, with especially high prevalence of the disease in ultraorthodox communities. I would like to express my concern that holding two weeks of intensive celebrations, in the heart of the city of Uman, where tens of thousands of people will celebrate in crowded conditions, will inevitably have severe short and long term implications, both on the local community of Uman and beyond, as well as for the State of Israel. A gathering of this sort, at such troubled times, is expected to generate mass events of infection of tourists and local Ukrainian residents, turning into a heavy burden on local medical systems, while thousands more are expected to come back to Israel and further spread the virus.



These annual celebrations are of high folklore importance, but these are unusual times that call for different measures. I believe the health and safety of the Ukrainian and Israeli populations should take preference over the need to perform these rituals. I urge you to enforce a ban on these celebrations this year, as part of the entire global community's effort to stop this horrific pandemic.

Best regards,

Prof. Ronni Gamzu

Head of Coronavirus Coordination Project

State of Israel

