For the past three consecutive Saturdays, Soviet security police, the dreaded KGB, have been arresting groups of young Jews on their way to Sabbath services in the synagogues of Kiev and Minsk. Eleven of these devout young people were sentenced to fifteen days in jail on charges of hooliganism. Jewish intellectuals and scientists, such as Dr. Alexander Lerner and Dr. Vladimir Slepak, and others who have sought exit visas from the Soviet Union, have been fired from their positions, and are being subjected to a stepped-up campaign of harassment and intimidation. The drumbeat of anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist propaganda has not diminished in Russia in recent weeks. Some forty Jewish prisoners of conscience are interned in Soviet prisons, living in harsh conditions, a number of them suffering from ill health. In January about 3,000 Jews were allowed to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Israel; in February the rate dropped to 1,800. It is now evident that the situation of Russian Jewry has begun to deteriorate once again.

For these reasons, the National Interreligious Consultation on

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Soviet Jewry which opens a two-day meeting tonight at the University of Chicago assumes vital national and even international importance. This unprecedented ecumenical and interreligious conference brings together some 200 key religious, civic, and human rights leaders representing the broadest spectrum of American theological and political conviction. A virtual Who's Who of American leadership--Christian and Jewish, black and white, Democrat and Republican--will engage in an intensive search for more effective means to influence the Soviet authorities to permit the free exercise of religion and culture in the Soviet Union, to end discrimination against religious minorities and to permit citizens to emigrate to countries of their choice in accordance with Russia's commitments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In her keynote address this evening, Mrs. Rita Hauser, former United States Ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, will make an official policy declaration on Soviet Jewry in behalf of President Nixon's Administration. Ambassador Hauser in her advance text pledges this Administration's commitment to press the Soviet Government to let emigrate all those Jews who seek to leave on fair and humane terms. "This is a commitment," Mrs. Hauser will tell the American people, "that is grounded in our history and in the knowledge that systematic deprivation of human rights anywhere poses a threat to all of us."