STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN ROBERT F. DRINAN
RESPONDING TO MESSAGES FROM THE KREMLIN,
CHALLENGES THE USSR TO ISSUE VISAS FOR TEN
AMERICAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS

On April 19 President Nixon assured a group of fourteen national Jewish leaders in the White House that the Soviet Union had suspended the exorbitant fees which it has charged since August 1972 on Soviet Jews wishing to leave the USSR.

If the USSR has in fact rescinded the exit fee imposed upon educated Soviet Jews then the Kremlin should have no difficulty in reinstating the visas granted on January 24 but revoked on February 2, 1973 for 10 American religious leaders including myself who desired to go to Russia to express their solidarity with the three million Jews of Russia.

The withdrawal of permission to travel to Russia previously extended to 10 of the most distinguished religious leaders in America was an open admission by Russia that it did not want any outside investigation of the conditions which it imposes upon Soviet Jews.

Speaking on behalf of this group of 10 American religious officials (whose names are attached) I openly proclaim our re-application for visas to travel to the Soviet Union from May 24 to May 30, 1973.
On behalf of this group I have sent a letter to President Nixon asking that he intercede on our behalf with the appropriate officials in Russia.

On behalf of these 10 religious officials whose visas were withdrawn on February 2, 1973 I have also written to Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin asking that the USSR, by issuing visas for myself and nine others, make clear to the world that its professed rescission of exorbitant fees for exit visas is universal and permanent.

The continued exclusion from Russia of 10 American religious officials can only be construed by the entire world as an admission that Russia does not want to have any verification of its assertion that it has granted new freedom to the Jews of Russia to emigrate.

The members of the United States Congress cannot and will not believe in the sincerity of Soviet intentions with respect to Soviet Jews until the Kremlin rescinds its cancellation of visas for these American church-affiliated authorities.

Unless the Soviet Union promptly issues visas to the 10 representatives of the Interreligious Consultation on Soviet Jewry I will continue to work as diligently as possible for the enactment of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment which would deny the
status of most-favored nation to Russia because of its denial of freedom and justice to Soviet Jews.

CONGRESS HAS A RIGHT TO KNOW WHAT THE KREMLIN HAS PROMISED

On April 19 President Nixon in effect asked the 14 top Jewish leaders whom he invited to the White House to withdraw their support of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment on the basis of an unsigned Kremlin statement read to this group by Dr. Kissinger. As a Member of Congress I am not going to withdraw my support from the Jackson-Vanik proposal because of some undisclosed alleged promise by the Kremlin. I feel certain that the 14 Jewish leaders invited to the White House will not allow themselves to be manipulated or intimidated by President Nixon's determination to give very advantageous trade concessions to the Soviet Union. I feel confident also that these leaders and the Members of Congress will not be intimidated if President Nixon declares that the promise of trade benefits to Russia was a part of a secret agreement with Russia with respect to the Indochina war.

There is absolutely no evidence to indicate that the alleged rescission of the exit fees means that Russia will in fact permit free migration of Soviet Jews to Israel or elsewhere. All that the undisclosed statement from the Kremlin means is that, at
the very best, Soviet Jews will return to the very uncertain status which they had in the USSR in August, 1972.

The fact is that the USSR is still denying visas every single day to Soviet Jews. All of the evidence indicates moreover that Russia severely penalizes those Jews who have the courage to apply for exit visas.

On May 14-15 the National Interreligious Consultation on Soviet Jewry will hold a massive public meeting and demonstration in Washington, D.C. I hope that long before May 14 the 10 religious leaders who had planned to visit Russia under the auspices of this Interreligious Consultation on Soviet Jewry will have received their visas and that they be preparing for their long-awaited trip to visit with the Jews of Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev.

CONCLUSIONS AND DETERMINATIONS

I appeal in this statement to all of my fellow Christians in America to remain firm and steadfast at this time behind the determination of the national leadership of the Jewish community in America to secure the liberation of Soviet Jews. It seems clear that President Nixon is seeking to intimidate the Jewish leadership of America by implying to them, however indirectly,
that they can inadvertently destroy the peace in Indochina which Nixon negotiated with Russia. Jewish leadership will need every manifestation of solidarity from Christians in the weeks and months ahead before the probable enactment of trade legislation by the Congress prior to its summer recess that begins on August 3, 1973.

The Nixon Administration will be seeking to persuade Republicans and Democrats to remove their support from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. The Nixon Administration will do this on the basis of the one undisclosed letter read by Dr. Kissinger to the 14 top Jewish leaders in America.

Christians as never before should speak out and proclaim that the human rights of Soviet Jews are more important than the commercial rights of American businessmen.

President Nixon will continue to insist that this question should be left up to the Administration to resolve in diplomatic ways. Diplomacy did not bring about any justice for the Jews when President Nixon visited the Kremlin in the spring of 1972. The Nixon Administration did not bring about any justice when John Mitchell, then Attorney General, promised that he would use his parole power to allow Soviet Jews to enter America as refugees. On the basis of that promise by the then Attorney General a large group of Congressmen including myself
suspended their activities on behalf of the enactment of a bill which would have allowed up to 30,000 visas for Soviet Jews. I myself regret that I did not press on for the enactment of that law.

It was the virtual certainty of the enactment of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment by Congress which caused the Kremlin to make whatever commitment it has to President Nixon.

Speaking for myself and hopefully for virtually everyone of the 275 House sponsors of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment I proclaim that I expect to continue to support that Amendment and that I will vote against any bill granting the most-favored nation status to the Soviet Union unless it guarantees the freedom to emigrate to the three million Jews in Russia.

The 14 top national Jewish leaders who met with President Nixon on April 19 will meet again with a larger group of Jewish leaders on Thursday, April 26. I have the hope that those leaders at that time, aided by the pledges and prayers of American Christians and strengthened by the 76 Senators and 275 Congressmen who have endorsed the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, will remain unyielding and proclaim once again to the entire world that the Congress and the people of the United States will not grant to Russia those trade concessions for which it clamors until that nation guarantees to all individuals in the Soviet Union that right to migrate which is a
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fundamental freedom guaranteed by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.
PARTICIPANTS IN PROJECTED VISIT TO SOVIET UNION

Dr. Thomas E. Bird, Professor of Slavic Studies, City University of New York at Queens College

Mother Margaret Brennan, President, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Monroe, Michigan

Dr. Milton K. Curry, Jr, President, Baptist College, Dallas Texas

Rep. Robert F. Drinan, S.J., Member of Congress, Massachusetts; Former Dean, Boston College School of Law

Rev. Edward H. Flannery, Executive Secretary, Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C.

Mrs. Ursula Niebuhr, widow of the distinguished theologian Reinhold Niebuhr

Rev. Dr. Arnold T. Olson, President, The Evangelical Free Churches of America; Vice-President, United Bible Societies; Immediate Past President, National Association of Evangelicals; Minneapolis, Minnesota

Mr. Gerald Strober, Project Director, Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee, New York, New York

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, National Director, Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee, New York, New York

Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, Former Executive Director, National Interreligious Consultation of Soviet Jewry