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Grace Meng
Congress of the United States

Sixth District, New York

March 14, 2014

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

I write to inquire about the widespread denial of tourist visas to young Israelis seeking to travel to the United States following their military service. I have many Israeli and Russian immigrants in my district who have relatives in Israel seeking to visit them following the relatives' military service.

Such traveling is a time-honored and venerable tradition in Israel. This is the Israeli way of saying "thank you for your service." While Israeli society asks its young adults to fight in the world's most dangerous places, it also affords them the opportunity to heal from the wounds of war and become citizens of the world.

Unfortunately, it has come to my attention that the State Department presumes that such Israelis seek to illegally sell Dead Sea products in shopping malls, and that *this* is the reason they do not receive tourist visas. This is upsetting. I understand that Senators Schumer, Graham, and Feinstein, and Congresswoman Eshoo have already contacted the State Department on this issue. In response to a letter from Senator Graham, the Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs Julia Frifield provided information on *visitor* visas granted to Israelis aged 21-30. But I'm interested in information on a more specific group of Israelis.

I respectfully request from you the denial rate for *tourist B-2* visas for Israelis between the ages of 21-27. I would be grateful if you would inform me of the number of Israelis who applied for a visa and the number of those who received a visa, not simply the percentage of applications that were approved.

I am concerned with the negative presumption regarding the beautiful tradition of young Israelis traveling after the army and before college. If indeed there is a problem with young Israelis working illegally in American shopping malls, I would be happy to work with you to facilitate greater enforcement and public awareness of this problem in Israel. But the current, apparent presumption of nefarious intent on the part of young Israelis seems unfair, and I urge that you end it.

Sincerely,

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

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