



US PASSPORTS IN ISRAEL

STATEMENT: February 24, 2021

Due to the Coronavirus crisis, over the past year, it has been extremely difficult to renew or obtain new US passports in Israel. We have been working to alleviate these difficulties throughout the pandemic. Additionally, we have frequently advocated at the US consulate in cases of emergencies, such as death or medical crises, and have been working tirelessly for a long-term solution.

It has come to our attention that American citizens in Israel are submitting fraudulent documentation to the U.S. Consulates in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in an effort to facilitate pre-Pesach travel. This practice has, unfortunately, created situations of both *pikuach nefesh* and *chilul Hashem* and must be stopped immediately.

Having seen an unusual increase in emergency medical requests over the past few weeks for passport renewals and CRBAs – (Consular Reports of Birth Abroad) - the consulate has begun the time-consuming task of scrutinizing each one. They have found that many of these so-called emergencies have been falsified and as a result, those with true emergencies who would normally have been able to obtain documentation within hours are now being forced to wait days as consulate staff verifies medical records on each and every application.

This issue has caused potentially life-threatening delays. In one instance last week, a cancer patient who applied for an emergency passport was subjected to a four day wait instead of being approved for travel within hours. It is intolerable that this patient's medical care was compromised by those submitting bogus paperwork to the consulate indicating that they or their baby have a serious medical condition that requires treatment in America. Furthermore, doctors who signed on these letters are now facing consequences that may affect their licenses, while others whose signatures were forged have to prove that neither they nor their staff issued these fraudulent letters.

We understand that U.S. citizens are anxious to get back to America for Pesach. However, these illegitimate efforts are unacceptable, jeopardizing lives and hampering our effort to advocate for the public, both now and in the future.

Instead, we ask that:

- **Those who have expiring passports that can still be used for travel do their renewals in America, a significantly easier process.**
- **Those who can renew their passports by mail do so immediately, given the average turnaround time of four to five weeks. Those who need their passports in a shorter time frame should include a note with their application indicating their travel dates, along with a request for an emergency one-year passport. Please note that the consulate will not grant in-person appointments for anyone who is eligible to renew their passports by mail.**
- **Those holding expired U.S. passports contact us at travel@amudim.org, which goes to both Amudim and Chaim V'Chessed staff, so that we can guide them appropriately.**

It is important to keep in mind that the consulate's priority is ensuring the health of its staff during the pandemic, since if, *chas v'shalom*, an issue was to arise, the consulate would be forced to close completely and no one would be able to receive any assistance at all, emergency or otherwise. Baruch Hashem, by following the COVID guidelines of both Israel's Ministry of Health and the CDC, there have been no virus transmissions in the consulate which is currently open every other day and accepting an extremely limited number of applications. **Therefore, it is essential that consulate services be reserved for those only with true medical emergencies.**

We understand that people feel strongly about being able to return home to their families for Pesach, but submitting fraudulent documents to the consulate is wrong and can have serious consequences on multiple levels. Please feel free to contact us if you need guidance and we will do our best to assist you.

Zvi Gluck



Paysach Freedman

