Today, Thursday 16 May, Ukrainians the world over are once again donning their finest for Vyshyvanka Day. Vyshyvanky – embroidered shirts – have long been popular symbols of Ukraine, our people and our culture. This inspired students at Chernivtsi National University in 2006 to dedicate one day a year in celebration of their embroidered shirts, be they family heirlooms or modern reinterpretations. Now celebrated each 3rd Thursday of May, this unique Ukrainian tradition has become a worldwide viral sensation. Regardless of where your reside, UCCA asks that you wear your shirts with pride, share that pride on social media, and join in events taking place in your city (see our last email).
On 16 May 1954, at the notorious Kingir prison, a special camp for “political prisoners” within the Gulag system of the Soviet Union situated near the central-Kazakhstan city of Dzhezkazgain, a great uprising began which led to the brutal massacre of five hundred to seven hundred people after a 40 day rebellion. This great uprising forced doubt into the minds of Soviet leaders over their ability to control their captive population, when even their infamous gulags could not break the spirit of dissidents. Some historians consider this uprising as the first step on the road to the final collapse of the USSR.

According to historical accounts, the massive rebellion of May-June 1954 led to the seizure of the entire camp compound by Ukrainian and Baltic prisoners after the guards fled. The brave inmates held out against Soviet forces for approximately forty days. In that time they elected a provisional government of their own, undertook numerous activities including marriages and religious ceremonies, a brief flowering of art and culture, and the waging of a large propaganda campaign against their Soviet captors.

On 25 June 1954, Soviet forces eventually suppressed the rebellion by calling in the Red Army to decimate 500-700 prisoners with the use of tanks and munitions usually reserved for the battlefield. One of the most horrific
accounts of the seizure was that of the 500 female inmates who lined up before the tanks in an effort to stop their advance only to be mercilessly crushed by them as the authorities proceeded to take back control of the Gulag prison.

The story of this heroic uprising against tyranny is one that should never be forgotten as yet another testament to the human spirit and its quest for liberty.

In 2001, thanks to generous donations from the Ukrainian American community, UCCA's Council on Aid to Ukrainians (CAU) unveiled a monument to the victims of the Kingir uprising. The monument, pictured above, stands on the burial ground of the uprising’s victims.

Each 18 May, the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), the representative organization of nearly 2 million Americans of Ukrainian descent, joins with the Ukrainian World Congress, the worldwide assembly of Ukrainian organizations representing over 20 million people, the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, and the Government of Ukraine, to pause in remembrance for the innocent victims of the crime of genocide committed against the Crimean Tatar people by Josef Stalin’s soviet henchmen in 1944.
The Sürgün (or “violent expulsion”) in May of 1944 was a purposeful action by Ukraine’s imperial enemy to the North, to rid the Crimean peninsula of its approximately 238,000 indigenous people, the Qirim Tatar Millet. The Crimean Tatars were forcibly deported to other parts of the USSR, with no right to return until 1989. Finally, in 1991, the Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People convened in Crimea for only the second gathering in a century.

23 years later, Vladimir Putin staged Russia’s military invasion and current illegal occupation of Crimea, and today seeks to erase any semblance of the indigenous Crimean Tatar identity from their homeland, replacing Crimean Tatar place names, and further removing opportunities for the Crimean Tatar language and culture to be taught and passed on.

Once again, the indigenous Crimean Tatar people of Ukraine are forbidden from gathering at traditional commemorative events in their native land. In Russian-occupied Crimea, severe restrictions have been placed on the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly, including at traditional commemorative events such as the anniversary of the genocidal deportation of the Crimean Tatars. The Representative Assembly of the Crimean Tatar People, the Mejlis, has been illegally banned. The Crimean Tatar People are once again the victims of a cruel and ruthless occupation regime, and the language, rights, and culture of the Crimean Tatar people remains as much under threat today, as they were during the Soviet and Tsarist regimes.

On this solemn anniversary of the Deportation-Genocide of the Crimean Tatar people, UCCA continues to voice our support for the Crimean Tatar people in their struggle for their rights, and again calls on the governments of the free world to recognize Stalin’s actions as crimes of genocide.

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Secretary Blinken speaks at Kyiv Polytechnic Institute

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**WHAT IS UCCA?**

The Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA) is a non-profit, non-partisan community-based organization that has represented the interests of Ukrainians in the United States since 1940.

**ЦЯ О ТАК Е УККА?**

Український Конгресовий Комітет Америки (УККА) є неприбутковою, безпартійною громадською організацією, яка представляє інтереси українців у Сполучених Штатах Америки з 1940 року.

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