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HELSINKI COMMISSION NOMINATES EIGHT HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS FOR 1983 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

Washington, D.C. -- Congressional members of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, known as the Helsinki Commission, today made public their nomination on January 31, 1983 of eight leaders of the Helsinki human rights movement for the 1983 Nobel Peace Prize: from the Soviet Union -- Yuri Orlov, Anatoly Shcharansky and Mykola Rudenko; from Lithuania -- Viktoras Petkus; from Czechoslovakia -- Vaclav Havel; and from Poland -- Lech Walesa, Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik.

The five Senators and six Representatives noted in their letter to the Nobel Institute that "the courageous work of citizens' groups in the Soviet Union, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia and Poland in promoting the human rights principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act epitomizes an insight of 1974 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Andrei Sakharov that "the defense of human rights is a clear path towards the unification of people in our turbulent world and a path towards the relief of suffering." "In nominating these eight men, the CSCE Commission also paid tribute to the continued suffering of other participants in the citizens Helsinki human rights movement: "Ten in the Moscow Helsinki Group are serving a total of 97 years of imprisonment; 31 in the Ukrainian Helsinki Group were sentenced to a total of 222 years; five in the Lithuanian Helsinki Group are serving a total of 17 years, while six people in the affiliated groups are serving a total of 48 years of imprisonment... Today (in Czechoslovakia), as many as 25 (Charter '77 and VONS) members are imprisoned or forced into exile...(In Poland) at least 1,500 Polish citizens (remain in prison) awaiting trial (with) 2,500 others convicted of martial law offenses."

The nomination of Walesa, Michnik, Kuron, Havel, Orlov, Shcharansky Rudenko and Petkus for the 1983 Nobel Peace Prize was signed by Senators Robert Dole (R-Kans.), Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), John Heinz (R-Pa.), Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Representatives Dante Fascell (D-Fla.), Sidney Yates (D-Ill.) Timothy Wirth (D-Colo.), Edward Markey (D-Mass.), Don Ritter (R-Pa.), and Christopher Smith (R-N.J.).

UPDATE ON IMPRISONED HELSINKI MONITORS

Recent reports also indicate a further deterioration in the situation of Soviet imprisoned human rights activists:

-- Mrs. Yuri Orlov announced in Moscow on January 31, 1983 that her husband had been subjected to a brutal beating in labor camp on October 28, 1982 in front of wardens; Orlov was then sent to solitary confinement for 15 days and then to his fourth six-month term where he manually knits metal netting.

-- In late January, there were reports that Psychiatric Working Group member, Vyacheslav Rakhmin, is facing new charges and will not be released in mid-February when his present camp sentence expires. Another member of this group, Irina Grivnina, who is pregnant and serving a term of internal exile, should be eligible for release under a recent amnesty. Other Soviet Helsinki Monitors, such as Ukrainians Petro and Vasyl Sichko, have fallen victim to a new official tactic of repeated sentencing of prominent human rights activists, thereby keeping them in prison. Because of inadequate medical attention, Aleksandr Podrabinek and Yuri Shukhevych have become seriously ill.

-- On January 26, 1983 TASS announced that criminal charges were being brought against Lithuanian priest, Father Alfonsas Svarinkas, for "systematically instigating believers to wage open struggle against Soviet power." Father Svarinkas is an active member of the unofficial Catholic Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Believers which publicly criticizes the abysmal Soviet record on religious liberty. If the Soviets actually put Father Svarinkas on trial -- which will likely provoke intense public protest in Lithuania -- it would be the first time in ten years that a priest has faced imprisonment in Lithuania.

Ironically, the only potential bright spot in this gloomy picture was provided by Yuri Andropov in his January 23, 1983 letter to French Communist leader, Georges Marchais, when he noted:

Soviet law does not exclude the possibility of a reduction of the sentence which would answer a request for early release for people condemned for this sort of crime. But, for Soviet law, this depends on the conduct of the prisoner. It is evident that such a possibility is not helped by noisy campaigns and exterior pressures. To the contrary, this is detrimental.

The members of the Helsinki Commission hope that Andropov's comment indicates that the governments of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and Poland will at last begin to heed their Helsinki human rights pledges. For, as Andrei Sakharov has said, there is an "indissoluble bond between international security and trust... and respect for human rights and an open society."