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PRESS RELEASE

Helsinki Committee established in Prague
Authorities crack down on independent seminar

Vienna, November 11, 1988 -- In spite of severe attacks on independent activity in Czechoslovakia, a group of renown human rights activists have announced the establishment of a Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee. The founding statement of the newly established committee reached the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights in Vienna and is scheduled to be released today at the opening of the seminar in Prague. The Prague seminar is organized by the following opposition groups: Charter '77, the Jazz Section, the Association for Friendship between the CSSR and the US, the Independent Peace Association and the Democratic Initiative.

The International Helsinki Federation welcomes this initiative as an extremely important development for the international Helsinki movement, especially now that the Czechoslovak authorities have lately been showing an appalling disrespect for the commitments made under the Helsinki Final Act.

Whereas in other Warsaw Pact countries seminars of independent groups have taken place without state interference and with participation of foreigners, the Czechoslovak authorities have taken harsh measures to render the seminar in Prague impossible. Already in an early stage, the organizers of the seminar have been interrogated and warned that the seminar would be illegal. On Thursday morning, November 10, one day before the seminar was scheduled to begin, 11 persons were reported to the IHF to be detained for periods of 96 hours (see enclosed information sheet).

The actions of the police against this seminar and against other peaceful activities of independent groups, once again underlines the need and the importance of the establishment of a Helsinki Committee, which will be solely dedicated to monitor the state compliance with the Helsinki Accords.

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**INTERNATIONAL
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The Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee, under the chairmanship of Jiri Hajek, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and one of the co-founders of Charter '77, considers its most important task to provide the public with objective information about the meaning and importance of the Helsinki Accords and its follow-up documents. The committee's founding document states that the efforts for security and cooperation in Europe which were introduced by the Helsinki Final Act, should not only be a matter of government concern, but of citizens initiatives as well.

The committee, which has already been in close contact to Helsinki Committees in other countries and to the International Helsinki Federation, will work towards "a constructive dialogue with both the authorities of the federal government and federal parliament, and with official and semi-official institutions, like the Czechoslovak Commission of European Security and, of course, with all interested citizens."

(full text of the founding statement enclosed).