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Embargo date:
December 1, 1988

PRESS RELEASE

Vienna, December 1, 1988 -- On November 30, 1988, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) and its national Helsinki committees unanimously adopted the Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee and the Polish Helsinki Committee as members of the IHF. This brings the number of national Helsinki committees to 15. Presently, the IHF has members in Austria, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the Soviet Union, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and Yugoslavia.

The Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee was founded on November 5, 1988 by 19 prominent Czechoslovak citizens, including the author Vaclav Havel. The chairman of the Committee is Prof. Dr. Jiri Hajek. The founding of the Committee was formally announced on November 11, during the Prague symposium "Czechoslovakia 1988", which was brutally interrupted by the Czechoslovak authorities.

The committee considers its main task to provide objective information on the state of human rights in Czechoslovakia in an attempt to advance the principles and resolutions of the Helsinki Final Act. It will monitor cases of human rights violations and work to solve them.

The Polish Helsinki Committee, consisting of 12 members, including lawyers, journalists, and professors, was founded in the fall of 1982. It has since then published a number of solid and thorough reports on the human rights situation in its home country. Its members who in the first years were forced to operate anonymously, publicly revealed their membership in the summer of 1988.

The committee's first task is to inform the public and international organs about the human rights' violations committed by the Polish government. Furthermore, the members conclude in their first open statement, that "conditions are now emerging for undertaking wider activities aiming at eliminating the legal mechanisms which make possible arbitrary actions by state authorities and at diminishing the repressiveness of the law."

The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights believes that the addition of Helsinki committees in Czechoslovakia and Poland to the existing members of the IHF is a mayor step forwards in its fight for the respect for human rights in Helsinki signatory states.

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