

THE INTERNATIONAL HELSINKI FEDERATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

PRESS RELEASE - NOVEMBER 9, 1982

Madrid, November 9, 1982 ---- Citizens from eight countries that signed the Helsinki Accords announced today the formation of the "International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights" by national committees in Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States.

At a news conference in Madrid at the re-opening of the Helsinki Review Conference the International Helsinki Federation released two reports, "Violation of the Helsinki Accords" and "Political Prisoners in Poland".

Spokesmen of the federation urged that citizens in prison for monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Agreement must be freed and allowed to continue their work.

"One of the fundamental principles of the Helsinki Accords is the right of each individual to know and act upon his rights. The persecution of the members of Helsinki Committees throughout Eastern Europe is clearly a violation of the agreement."

The International Helsinki Federation asked governments to join in putting pressure on Eastern countries' authorities to improve the situation of those people in Eastern Europe who are demanding the implementation of the Helsinki agreement.

"In signing the agreement, authorities in neutral and Western countries have taken upon themselves a moral responsibility to help protect those who live by the Act."

Spokesmen of the federation asked that it be made clear to the Soviet Union that, in order to reach fruitful results from the CSCE conference in Madrid, all countries must show their willingness to uphold all aspects of the agreements which they have signed.

"Peace is the overall goal of international cooperation," the spokesmen said. "But it is unrealistic to believe that lasting peace and disarmament can be secured if human rights are trampled. The fundamental reason for the arms race is the lack of mutual trust, but such trust is impossible as long as citizens are denied their right of freedom of expression and their right to monitor their governments' actions."

The International Helsinki Federation, which hopes to establish citizens committees in all of the 35 countries which signed the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, set forth the following goals:

- 1) to seek continuation of the Helsinki process
- 2) to insist that peace, human rights and economic cooperation must continue to be linked as they are linked in the 1975 Helsinki Accords
- 3) to promote the view that just as peace is necessary for human rights, the protection of human rights is necessary for peace
- 4) to press for the rights of activists for peace and disarmament to express their views without harassment and to communicate freely with citizens in other countries
- 5) and, above all, to demand that citizens monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Agreement must be freed from prison if the Helsinki process is to continue meaningfully.

The report "Violations of the Helsinki Accords" singles out Poland and the Soviet Union as the most blatant violators of the Helsinki Agreements. Since the Madrid talks recessed in March, Poland and the Soviet Union have escalated their repressive measures against citizen Helsinki monitors. The report also outlines the abuse of human rights in Czechoslovakia, Romania, Turkey, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and East Germany. All of these countries have systematically violated the Helsinki Final Act's agreement to respect human rights and promote the free flow of information and people. Citizens who have publicized violations of the Helsinki Accords in these countries have been imprisoned; international communications travel abroad, and emigration are greatly restricted.

While asserting that the right of the individual to know and act upon his rights is generally respected in the United States and Western Europe, the report points to areas where violations have occurred: in the United States in its treatment of refugees, particularly Haitians seeking political asylum in the United States, and in West European countries where there are abuses with regard to minorities and migrant workers.

Great concern must be expressed about the proclamation of the so-called "anti-parasite law" by the Polish Parliament. This law enables the Polish authorities to send jobless non-conformist Poles to labor camps in a fashion similar to proceedings in the USSR and Czechoslovakia.

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"Political Prisoners in Poland" was prepared for the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights by the New York based "Committee in Support of Solidarity." It is a listing of 349 Polish citizens who, since December 12, 1982 have been tried and sentenced by civil and military tribunals under the decree of military law. The Committee in Support of Solidarity estimates that as many as 30,000 Poles have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from three months to nine years and that at least 10,000 are now serving sentences or are awaiting trial.

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The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights was organized in Italy in September of 1982 by citizens from 18 Helsinki signatory countries under the working name of "The International Helsinki Human Rights Committee." It federates Helsinki committees in eight Western countries and is working with human rights activists in other countries who plan to form Helsinki groups where they do not presently exist. Serving as consultants are representatives of groups in Eastern Europe as well as the representative in the West of Moscow Helsinki Group, the pioneer group that inspired citizens' committees in other countries to monitor their governments' compliance with the Helsinki accords and that was recently forced to discontinue its work.

The groups are represented in Madrid by:

- Stein Ivar Aarsaether, Norwegian Helsinki Committee
- Pierre Emmanuel, Comite Parisien pour le Respect de l'Acte Finale de Helsinki
- Lennart Groll and Gerald Nagler, Swedish Helsinki Human Rights Committee
- Jeri Laber, U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee
- Jana Starek, Austrian Helsinki Committee
- Arie Bloed, Helsinki Committee, Dutch branch, International Commission of Jurists

Also included in the International Helsinki Federation are the Canadian Helsinki Watch Group and the Belgian League for Human Rights.