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Helsinki Human Rights Day, 1987

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Twelve years ago, the United States, Canada, and 33 European countries signed the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. These nations thereby committed themselves to observe important standards of international conduct and to respect basic human rights and fundamental freedoms at home. They also pledged themselves to pursue practical steps to reduce the barriers by which the Soviet Union has divided Europe into East and West, denying the nations of Eastern Europe the right of self-determination and limiting contact between peoples.

The Helsinki Final Act embodies its signatories' agreement that freedom and human rights are the best guarantors of peace. It mandated that these freedoms, routinely enjoyed by the peoples of the West, be recognized and respected as well in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. After more than a decade, though there have been some limited gains, that mandate has not been fulfilled.

The Soviet Union and the Soviet-dominated governments of Eastern Europe have systematically violated many of their most fundamental Helsinki pledges. Freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, and belief are constrained. Loved ones, families, and friends are kept apart. The flow of ideas and information is restricted. The right of the individual to depart from and return to his own country is denied. Helsinki monitors and other prisoners of conscience continue to languish in prisons, labor camps, psychiatric hospitals, and internal exile, merely for expressing their political and religious beliefs. In Perm Camp 36-1, the most brutal of the labor camps in the Gulag, ten political prisoners—three of whom were Helsinki monitors—have died in the last 3 years. Harsh treatment and lack of medical care threaten the lives of those remaining in the camp.

These and other violations have exacted a fearsome and tragic human cost, and they reflect a disregard for the fundamental principle that in order for any of a nation's international agreements to be respected, all must be observed. The continuing violations of Helsinki obligations by the Soviet Union and the Soviet-dominated countries of Eastern Europe place in doubt those nations' faithful observance of their international obligations in every sphere.

The third Follow-up Meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe has been underway in Vienna since November 1986. The primary aim of the United States and its NATO Allies in Vienna is to secure compliance by the East with the commitments made at Helsinki, so that citizens in all the signatory states can enjoy the fundamental freedoms agreed to in the Final Act.

The Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 151, has designated August 1, 1987, as "Helsinki Human Rights Day" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in its observance.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim August 1, 1987, as Helsinki Human Rights Day and reaffirm the American commitment to universal observance of the values enshrined in the Final Act. These values are fundamental to our way of life and a source of inspiration to peoples around the world. In renewing our dedication with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities, let us call upon all signatories of the Final Act to match deeds with words and to respect in full its solemn principles and provisions.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirty-first day of July, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan