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Helsinki Human Rights Day

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

When the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, widely referred to as "Helsinki accords," was concluded in Helsinki on August 1, 1975, thirty-three governments of Eastern and Western Europe, as well as the United States and Canada, committed themselves to "respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion." The participating governments further committed themselves to foster "freer movement and contacts," improved access to information, and cultural and educational exchanges.

The Helsinki accords are a major achievement in the development of universal standards of international conduct and fundamental human rights. These standards go back to the earliest days of the American Republic. In a letter from Paris written to James Madison in 1787, Thomas Jefferson said that "a bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth." The Helsinki accords are, in effect, a bill of rights for all the people of Europe.

The Government of the United States is firmly committed to the full implementation of the human rights and humanitarian provisions of the Helsinki accords. The American people are unalterably dedicated to the preservation and promotion of fundamental human rights throughout the world. The Helsinki accords are a powerful diplomatic instrument to advance the cause of human dignity and liberty.

At the Helsinki follow-up meeting in Madrid, the United States along with other Western countries has pointed out the failures of the Soviet Union and East European states to comply with their obligations under the humanitarian and human rights provisions of the Helsinki accords. The suppression of the trade union *Solidarity* in Poland, the continuing acts of repression directed against the Helsinki monitors, the drastic decrease in the level of emigration from the Soviet Union, and the harassment and persecution throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe of citizens attempting to express their religious and political freedoms flagrantly denies the principles of Helsinki agreed to by the respective governments. These repressive actions not only threaten the achievement of genuine security and cooperation in Europe, but have a chilling effect on the human spirit of the brave peoples enduring this tyranny.

The Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 96, has designated August 1, 1983 as "Helsinki Human Rights Day" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of that day. On this occasion, Americans are afforded the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the human rights principles embodied in the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and to demonstrate their solidarity with the peoples of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, whose basic human rights are being violated by their governments on a continuing and regular basis.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 25th day of July, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and eighth.

Ronald Reagan