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17th January 1989

Charter 77 Document No. 5/89: *To the governments of the countries involved in the process of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have just signed a document in which all the participants in the Helsinki process pledge to avoid "all actions inconsistent with the provisions of the Final Act and other documents of the CSCE" and "acknowledge that any such act would jeopardise their mutual relations and would be an obstacle to the development of co-operation among them."

In Prague, on Sunday 15th January, a massive deployment of police, using armoured personnel carriers, water cannon, tear-gas and dogs, broke up a peaceful demonstration by Czechoslovak citizens in honour of the memory of the student Jan Palach who burned himself to death at Wenceslas Square twenty years ago as a warning against the continuing demoralisation of society in the wake of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. A group of representatives of different independent initiatives who wanted to place flowers on the site of his act were arrested by the police. Special riot police units and the People's Militia continued throughout the city centre that evening, dispersing, beating up and using water can-

non to drench thousands of citizens wanting to take part in the ceremony of remembrance. The police injured many of them, seriously in some cases.

There was a repetition of these police tactics the following day, Monday 16th January. But whereas on the Sunday they had been able at least to pretend that Wenceslas Square had been closed to forestall the possibility of a new human torch being ignited at Wenceslas Square – as had been threatened in a (probably fake) anonymous letter – on the Monday they deliberately provoked their own intervention. When several representatives of different citizens' initiatives laid flowers near to the statue of St Wenceslas – without calling on other citizens to join them – the police arrested them on the spot. The police then closed off the city centre and again used water-cannon, tear-gas and armoured personnel carriers to disperse the thousands of citizens who happened to be passing through at the time. It was actually the police brutality that first caused many of them to voice loud protests. The savage treatment meted out to peaceful citizens and the arrest of fourteen representatives of independent initiatives and other members of the public was therefore a show of strength and a deliberate political act.

Although the Czechoslovak authorities were obliged by international developments to sign the Vienna document, in reality they are making every endeavour to prevent any evolution towards democracy, and blocking all efforts to develop a free and independent intellectual climate and civic initiatives. Over the past three months, they have stepped up their attacks on independent groups, with the arrest of young activists of the Independent Peace Association, two of whom, Tomáš Dvořák and Hana Marvanová, still remain in custody. Also on remand are Petr Cibulka who faces a possible ten-year prison sentence for distributing independent literature, Eva Vidlařová, who attempted to defend him, and Ivan Jírouš, who faces five years in prison for a petition he organised accusing the authorities of responsibility for the death of

the political prisoner Pavel Wonka. Augustin Navrátil, the author of a petition, signed by over half a million people, calling for religious freedom and the separation of Church and State, is still the subject of a compulsory psychiatric order.

Czechoslovakia is not alone in its open attacks on the Helsinki process. The authorities in the GDR are pursuing a deliberate policy of treating activists of independent citizens' initiatives as criminals and forcing them to emigrate, such as on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. The independent groups stressed that "freedom always means freedom to dissent" and protested against the banning of Soviet films and journals. Just before the Vienna document was signed, about a hundred people were arrested in Leipzig, eight of whom are still in custody, charged with harming the State order, for which they could receive prison sentences of up to five years. During the week prior to the signing ceremony in Vienna, the Bulgarian authorities jailed seven activists of the independent Society for Human Rights, among other reasons because they gave interviews to Western radio stations. And the human rights situation in Romania is notorious.

These examples show that we are seeing the emergence of a de facto group of governments which oppose the positive changes in eastern Europe as well as rapprochement throughout Europe which is fostered most actively by the Helsinki process. If these positive developments are to continue then there can be no ignoring or even tolerating those governments which regard the documents they hypocritically sign as worthless scraps of paper.

Whether the signing by 35 states of a document whose clauses some of them neither observe nor have any obvious intention of doing so, will nevertheless help to stimulate an improvement in the human rights situation, only time will tell. Maybe the decision to sign a document at the end of the follow-up meeting in Vienna rather than have the talks collapse will turn out to have been justified. It will demand not just patience, but also determination.

When you assess the situation in Czechoslovakia, I beg you to bear in mind that the police units were deployed not against a frenzied mob but against people taking part in a ceremony of remembrance, and that Stanislav Penc jr., Jana Petrová, Saša Vondra, Jana Sternová, David Němec, Dana Němcová, Ota Veverka and Petr Placák are being held in custody along with Josef Žáček, Marek Ptáček, Václav Kratochvíl, Jitka Vavříková, Jiří Fiala and Václav Havel not for planting bombs, but for laying flowers.

Tomáš Hradílek – Charter 77 spokesperson

N.B. Charter 77 spokespersons Dana Němcová and Saša Vondra are currently held in custody.