

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

July 7, 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR HAMILTON JORDAN

FROM: JOE ARAGON JA

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS

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As you know, Joyce Starr has been serving as an unofficial monitor of human rights issues in the White House for some time now.

Joyce has kept me posted on her activities and from time to time has requested my assistance in her efforts to make sure that a strong focus is given to specific issues that arise. Examples are the Scharansky case, the Ceausescu visit, the Slepak and Nudel convictions. Stu Eizenstat and Bob Lipshutz have both been very supportive of Joyce's efforts.

However, in spite of the President's many forceful statements, the systematic elimination of human rights activists by the Soviets since the President first enunciated his human rights doctrine has proceeded with unabated intensity.

The Washington Post reported yesterday, for example, that "of the original 11 signers of the Helsinki monitoring groups founding declaration, only one is still unscathed by the Kremlin campaign."

On the previous day The New York Times reported that our embassy in Moscow has apparently shifted away from the Nixon-Ford policy of encouraging contact with Soviet dissidents, inviting them to embassy functions, etc. Referring to the embassy's recent fourth of July celebration, The Times says:

"Two years ago, before Mr. Carter came into office...invitations were extended to a variety of Soviet dissidents..."

Today not a single dissident was in sight, 'most of them are in jail or in the West' an American diplomat remarked.

Now embassy officials must get permission from superiors before meeting dissidents, even socially."

Wednesday afternoon, leaders of the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry met with Bob Lipshutz, Joyce, Ed Mezvinsky and me to discuss their urgent concern over the fate of Vladimir Slepak and Ira Nudel. The Task Force includes among its sponsors, Ralph Abernathy, Leonard Bernstein, Gerald Ford, W. Randolph Hearst, Hugh Scott, Theodore Hesburgh and many other prominent Americans.

One of those present, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum framed the issue as follows: "If there is a counterpart in the Soviet Union human rights movement to Martin Luther King, it is Vladimir Slepak. If this country permits his sentence to be carried out with no more than a low level inquiry by our embassy in Moscow then the Soviets will have successfully broken the back of the human rights movement in the Soviet Union. Slepak has been the backbone of the movement."

Stu is deeply concerned about Slepak who only has 12 days remaining for appeal of his conviction. He has forwarded the attached memo to the President. This case has great symbolism for not only is Slepak being punished, his entire family has felt the force of the Soviet authorities. One son made it to Israel, another is being hunted by Soviet police and is in hiding. Their mother, Maria Slepak will be put on trial charged with the same crime as her husband, as soon as she is strong enough to be taken out of the hospital. She is suffering from a bleeding ulcer.

Slepak, Orlov, Scharansky, Nadel, Ginzburg and other dissidents who have now been charged with various crimes pose for the administration not only the humanitarian dilemma but also a major domestic political issue. The American press is now beginning to wonder if our professed policy of human rights can be supported by any tangible evidence of actual concern at the embassy level.

Last month Cliff Brody who monitors human rights issues in Soviet block countries for Pat Derian expressed his concern this way:

The President and the Secretary of State have discussed particular cases and presented lists to their Soviet counterparts. However,

since the Embassy in Moscow has chosen to avoid an active diplomatic effort either to reconfirm our interest in these cases or to delineate exactly what the U.S. seeks from Helsinki, the Soviets are faced with a few high level public U.S. statements but no political message or interpretation by our senior representatives.

The Moscow embassy has permitted a few low-level inquiries by consular officers on the status of particular applications to emigrate; even these officers are not instructed to ask the Soviets for favorable decisions, but simply to reiterate interest in the application process. Notwithstanding the public impression that the Scharansky, Slepak, Orlov, Ginsberg cases have been "raised", the embassy has not once asked the Soviets on an official basis that these individuals be allowed to exercise their Helsinki Rights -- even though the Helsinki Final Act specifically provides the opportunity for such intervention.

Conclusion: The President has staked out a courageous position on this vital issue. He is deeply committed to human rights.

Nevertheless, it appears that in the one nation where human rights is center stage for the world, the President's own commitment is being diluted or frustrated by diplomats who have "finessed" the issue through low level contacts and a coolness towards the dissidents that borders on neglect. If we do not move forcefully to assist the Slepaks and others, this issue will become a major liability for the President.

I therefore recommend you meet soon with Stu, Bob Lipshutz, Joyce Starr and possibly Cliff Brody to discuss it and perhaps suggest a course of action for the President.