

Remarks to Soviet Dissidents at Spaso House in Moscow

May 30, 1988

Well, thank you all, and welcome to Spaso House. After the discussions we've just had I thought it might be appropriate for me to begin by letting you know why I so wanted this meeting to take place. You see, I wanted to convey to you that you have the prayers and support of the American people, indeed of people throughout the world. I wanted to convey this support to you that you might in turn convey it to others so that all those working for human rights throughout this vast land, from the Urals to Kamchatka, from the Laptev Sea to the Caspian, might be encouraged and take heart.

In one capacity, of course, I speak as a head of government. The United States views human rights as fundamental, absolutely fundamental to our relationship with the Soviet Union and all nations. From the outset of our administration, we've stressed that an essential element in improving relations between the United States and the Soviet Union is human rights and Soviet compliance with international covenants on human rights. There have been hopeful signs; indeed, I believe this a hopeful time for your nation.

Over the past 3 years more than 300 political and religious prisoners have been released from labor camps. Fewer dissidents and believers have been put in prisons and mental hospitals. And in recent months, more people have been permitted to emigrate or reunite with their families. The United States applauds these changes, yet the basic standards that the Soviet Union agreed to almost 13 years ago in the Helsinki accords, or a generation ago in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, still need to be met. If I may, I'd like to share with you the main aims of our human rights agenda during this summit meeting here in Moscow.

Freedom of religion—in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. I'm hopeful the Soviet Government will permit all the peoples of the Soviet Union to worship their creator as they themselves see fit, in liberty.

Freedom of speech—again in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.” It is my fervent hope for you and your country that there will soon come a day when no one need fear prison for offenses that involve nothing more than the spoken or

written word.

Freedom of travel—I've told the General Secretary how heartened we are that during the past year the number of those permitted to emigrate has risen. We're encouraged as well that the number of those permitted to leave for short trips, often family visits, has gone up. And yet the words of the Universal Declaration go beyond these steps: “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his own country.” It is our hope that soon there will be complete freedom of travel.

In particular, I've noted in my talks here the many who have been denied the right to emigrate on the grounds that they held secret knowledge, even though their secret work had ended years before and their so-called secrets had long since become either public knowledge or obsolete. Such cases must be rationally reviewed.

And finally, institutional changes to make progress permanent. I've come to Moscow with this human rights agenda because, as I suggested, it is our belief that this is a moment of hope. The new Soviet leaders appear to grasp the connection between certain freedoms and economic growth. The freedom to keep the fruits of one's own labor, for example, is a freedom that the present reforms seem to be enlarging. We hope that one freedom will lead to another and another; that the Soviet Government will understand that it is the individual who is always the source of economic creativity, the inquiring mind that produces a technical breakthrough, the imagination that conceives of new products and markets; and that in order for the individual to create, he must have a sense of just that—his own individuality, his own self-worth. He must sense that others respect him and, yes, that his nation respects him—respects him enough to grant him all his human rights. This, as I said, is our hope; yet whatever the future may bring, the commitment of the United States will nevertheless remain unshakable on human rights. On the fundamental dignity of the human person, there can be no relenting, for now we must work for more, always more.

And here I would like to speak to you not as a head of government but as a man, a fellow human being. I came here hoping to do what I could to give you strength. Yet I already know it is you who have

strengthened me, you who have given me a message to carry back. While we press for human rights through diplomatic channels, you press with your very lives, day in, day out, year after year, risking your jobs, your homes, your all.

If I may, I want to give you one thought from my heart. Coming here, being with you, looking into your faces, I have to believe that the history of this troubled century will indeed be redeemed in the eyes of God and man, and that freedom will truly come to all. For what injustice can withstand your strength, and what

can conquer your prayers? And so, I say with Pushkin: "It's time my friend, it's time. The heart begs for peace, the days fly past, it's time, my friend, it's time."

Could I play a little trick on you and say something that isn't written here? Sometimes when I'm faced with an unbeliever, an atheist, I am tempted to invite him to the greatest gourmet dinner that one could ever serve and, when we finished eating that magnificent dinner, to ask him if he believes there's a cook. Thank you all, and God bless you.

Note.- The President spoke at 4:29 p.m. in the ballroom at the US. Ambassador's residence.