Helsinki Watch

On May 12, 1980, the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee published the names of thirty-nine men and women arrested in the USSR. Their crime, described as “anti-Soviet slander” and “anti-Soviet agitation,” was membership in groups that reported on human rights violations in the Soviet Union according to principles of the Helsinki Final Act. By May 12, 1981, the list had grown to forty-five names.

The Helsinki Final Act is a document outside the U.N. arena, but all the signers—thirty-three European countries, the United States, and Canada—are U.N. members. With commendable foresight the U.N. Charter authorizes such agreements so long as the provisions do not violate the Charter itself. The Act was signed in Finland on August 1, 1975 (though it is not a binding legal document because it has yet to be submitted for approval to the legislatures of the signatory countries).

The Final Act, possibly a prophetic phrase, was the result of pressure from the Soviet Union to guarantee national boundaries and, in effect, recognize Russian domination of Eastern Europe. Much is said about trade, cultural exchanges, and national sovereignty; but the troublesome items came as an afterthought. Known as Basket III, some rather simple human rights statements were forced upon the USSR and its supporters by the Western European countries as a prerequisite to signing. The key sentences read: “The participating states will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. They confirm the right of the individual to know and act upon his rights and duties in this field.”

An unusual feature of the Act called for regular meetings to evaluate conformance. This was a signal to human rights activists, and soon “Helsinki Watch committees” were formed all over Europe. The 1977 Belgrade meeting to review the Helsinki accord was a seven-month confrontation. At Soviet insistence the final report made no mention of human rights violations. The 1980 Madrid conference, just ended, again focused on human rights, though Soviet delegates maintained that the topic had no place on the agenda.

Following are forty-five Helsinki Watch monitors in the USSR and their current status:

Tried and sentenced.
YURI ORLOV physicist; 7 years in labor camp, 5 in exile
MYKOLA RUDENKO poet; 7 years in camp, 5 in exile
ANATOLY SHCHARANSKY computer scientist; 3 years in prison, 10 in camp
MERAB KOSTAVA music teacher; 3 years in camp, 2 in exile
OLEKSA TYKHY teacher; 10 years in camp, 5 in exile
VIKTORAS PETKUS laborer; 3 years in prison, 7 in camp, 5 in exile
ROBERT NAZARIAN physicist, deacon; 5 years in camp, 2 in exile

VLADIMIR SLEPAK radio & TV engineer; 5 years in exile
MYKOLA MATUSEVYCH historian, editor; 7 years in camp, 5 in exile
MYROSLAV MARYNOVYCH electrical engineer; 7 years in camp, 5 in exile
LEVKO LUKYANenko lawyer; 10 years in camp, 5 in exile
MALVA LANDA geologist (retired); 5 years in exile
OLES BERDNYK science-fiction writer; 6 years in camp, 3 in exile
VIKTOR SICHKO economist; 3 years in camp
LEV A SICHKO student; 3 years in camp
YURI LYTVYN translator, poet; 3 years in camp
MYKOLA HORBAL music teacher, 5 years in camp
OLES BERDNYK police officer; 10 years in camp, 5 in exile
DANYLO SHUMUK worker; 10 years in camp, 5 in exile
YURI SHUKHEVICH electrician; 10 years in camp, 5 in exile
VASYL ROMANYUK priest; 7 years in camp, 3 in exile
IRINA SENYK nurse; 6 years in camp, 3 in exile
BOHDAN REBRYK radio technician; 7 years in camp, 3 in exile
OKSANA POPOVYCH electrical worker; 8 years in camp, 5 in exile
VASYL OVSIENTKO literature teacher; 3 years in camp
IOSIF ZISELS television technician; 3 years in camp
VIKTOR NEKIPELOV writer; 7 years in camp, 5 in exile
PETRO ROZUMNY English teacher; 3 years in camp
VITALY KALNYCHENKO engineer; 10 years in camp, 5 in exile
YAROSLAV LESIV physical education instructor; 2 years in camp
OLHA HEYKO Czech specialist; 3 years in camp
ZINOVY KRASIVSKY poet; 8 months in camp, 5 years in exile
VYACHESLAV CHORNOVIL journalist; 5 years in camp
VYTAUTAS SKUODIS geologist; 7 years in camp, 5 in exile
ALGIRDAS STATKEVICIUS profession unknown; forced psychiatric treatment
EDUARD ARUTYUNIAN economist; 2½ years in camp

Under investigation:
MECISLOVAS JUREVIČIUS laborer
FELIKS SEREbroV welder, in prison, awaiting trial

Released upon completion of term:
SHAGEN ARUTYUNIAN shoemaker; 3 years in camp