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THE NATIONAL INTERRELIGIOUS TASK FORCE ON SOVIET JEWRY

AIDE MEMOIRE

SUBMITTED TO

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES
THE MADRID CONFERENCE ON EUROPEAN SECURITY AND COOPERATION

NOVEMBER 24, 1980



The National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry was founded in the United States in 1972, and includes among its leaders major personalities in the Roman Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, Evangelical, and Jewish communities. The Task Force has established affiliated interreligious groups in over 20 American cities, and it works in close cooperation with like-minded organizations in Canada and Western Europe.

We, the members of the Interreligious Task Force delegation to the 1980 Madrid Conference on European Security and Cooperation, firmly believe that the full exercise of human rights and religious liberty is vital to achieve a peaceful, just, and stable community of nations. We therefore welcome those confidence building measures that will help reduce tension between nations and peoples. One such measure would be full compliance with the Helsinki Final Act: particularly the Basket III provisions that guarantee respect for "fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief." In respectfully presenting the following points for consideration to the participants in the Madrid Conference, we believe we reflect the convictions of millions of people who are deeply committed to the principles of human rights and religious liberty.

1. Basket III of the Final Act is intended to promote the free flow of people, information, and ideas among the participating states. The Interreligious Task Force deplores the fact that the Soviet Union has implemented the right of emigration for its citizens in an excessively narrow manner, and it has placed obstacles in the path of those who wish to depart. We are especially dismayed by the recent sharp drop in the number of Soviet Jews who have been permitted to leave either for family reunification and/or for repatriation to Israel. New restrictions have been placed on those who seek to leave, including the introduction of an invitation ("visov") from a "close (or first degree) relative." This policy severely curtails the principle of family reunification, which we believe should be broadly interpreted. The right to leave one's country is internationally recognized and is specifically mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights.

Soviet citizens who have been denied permission to leave or who are imprisoned as a result of earlier attempts to emigrate must be granted permission to depart. Future exit visas should be issued on a "first-come-first served" basis without any impediments or discriminatory obstacles. No specific number or limit to emigration should be imposed.

2. The Final Act confirms the legitimacy of religious contacts among the citizens of the participatory states. Yet, two American Christian clergymen (one of them a member of our delegation) were detained last April at the Moscow Airport, and the religious material they were carrying was confiscated by Soviet authorities. The clergymen were visiting the USSR as part of an interreligious group in behalf of Soviet Jewry. Earlier this year two American visitors to the Soviet Union, a Roman Catholic nun and a Jewish woman, were detained in Kishinev, and were warned by officials not to contact their Soviet co-religionists in that city. There have been other reports of harassment and interference. All such acts are contrary to the "Human Contacts" provisions of the Final Act.

In addition to those who are imprisoned because they sought to leave the Soviet Union, we are particularly concerned with the status of the Christian Pentecostals who have sought asylum within the U.S. Embassy in Moscow during the past two years. They must be granted the right to leave the USSR and find new homes elsewhere.

3. As Christians and Jews, we condemn the current anti-Semitic campaign in the Soviet Union that defames and vilifies the Jewish People, the Jewish religion, and the State of Israel. Although the 1977 Soviet Constitution specifically "guarantees...the right to profess or not to profess any religion, and to conduct religious worship or atheistic propaganda," Jews and Judaism are still singled out for special discrimination and restrictions. The Soviet Union today is one of the chief producers and disseminators of anti-Semitic materials in the world. This systematic campaign undermines the security and well being of Soviet Jews and it gives support and legitimacy to anti-Semitic groups in other countries.

4. Principle VII of the Final Act explicitly cites Article 18 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. That Article mentions "freedom to manifest (his/her) religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching." The Interreligious Task Force believes that any interference in religious education is a violation of the Final Act, and is a basic denial of religious liberty. It is abhorrent to us that Jewish, Christian and Muslim parents in the USSR are legally forbidden to teach their children their religious traditions.

We are deeply concerned that Hebrew, the sacred language of the Jewish People and the Jewish religion, is taught in only a few higher educational institutions in the Soviet Union. There are 119 nationalities living in the USSR, 118 of these 119 nationalities have their own schools and instruction in their national language. Only Soviet Jews, although recognized as a national minority, are denied such schools and instruction in their national language, Hebrew. This policy of religious discrimination conflicts with the Soviet Constitution, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) Convention, and the Final Act.

5. We are disturbed by the continuing Soviet policy of placing restrictions on the registry of houses of worship. The number of functional and operating synagogues and churches has dropped sharply in recent years. Members of the Interreligious Task Force who have visited the Soviet Union this year report there are no "working" Roman Catholic churches in Kiev, and only one Catholic church in Moscow, Leningrad, and Odessa.

Soviet officials claim there are 92 extant synagogues, but reliable sources place the figure at only 57. Even accepting the claim of 92, this represents only one synagogue for roughly 20,000 Jews. Moreover, we know that many houses of worship are in disrepair with little or no attempt made to maintain them. This official policy of neglect is contrary to both the spirit and the substance of various international agreements which the Soviet Union has signed, including the Final Act.

6. Principle VII of the Final Act declares that the signatory nations "will

fulfill their obligations as set forth in the international declarations and agreements in this field by which they may be bound." The right to the free choice of employment is mentioned in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention Concerning Employment Policy (Article 1 (2) (c): "there is freedom of choice in employment and the fullest possible opportunity for each worker to qualify for, and to use his skills and endowments in a job for which he is well suited, irrespective of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin."

However, there have been cases of Soviet Jews and Christians being prevented from fully exercising their rights relating to employment. In some cases, Soviet citizens have been denied the right to work, tried for economic "parasitism", and imprisoned or exiled.

The National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry presents these issues and concerns in the spirit of international cooperation and reconciliation. By so doing we seek to alleviate the plight of all peoples who are deprived of their human rights and religious liberty.

Respectfully submitted,

MADRID, November 24, 1980

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National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry

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SISTER ANN GILLEN
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Dear Marc

I would like to use this Keston News Service piece in our Newsletter but it obviously needs commentary.

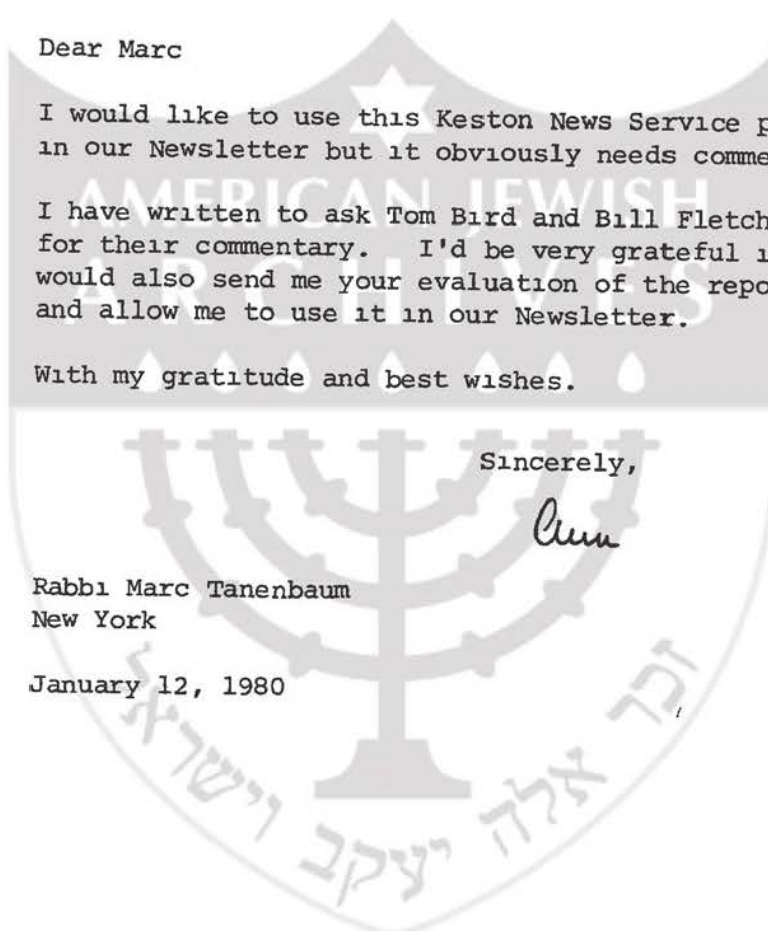
I have written to ask Tom Bird and Bill Fletcher for their commentary. I'd be very grateful if you would also send me your evaluation of the report and allow me to use it in our Newsletter.

With my gratitude and best wishes.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum
New York

January 12, 1980



SITUATION OF JEWISH BELIEVERS IN THE USSR

The Soviet journal "Nauka i Religiya" (Science and Religion), published an article on Judaism in its September 1980 issue. This article, states the journal, was written in reply to a number of queries received from readers, who have expressed interest in contemporary Judaism in the USSR; whether Jewish believers are in a situation to fulfill their spiritual needs, whether many believing Jews subscribe to Zionist ideas, and whether they are subjected to any form of persecution for their religious convictions.

The author of the article, Prof. Joseph Shapiro, "a member of The Council for Religious Affairs", states that before the 1917 revolution, Jewish clergy were supported by the government, because they "helped keep 6.5 million people in fear and slavery to Tsarism".

Prof. Shapiro gives the current number of synagogues in the USSR as 91, although Jewish sources in the country estimate the true number to be considerably lower. Despite the fact that "statistics of religions of citizens" are not kept in the USSR, states the author, he estimates "on the basis of certain sociological studies" that there are "some 60,000 adherents of Judaism" in the USSR, although "most of these are elderly, over 70 years of age". Since 1976, writes Prof. Shapiro, the number of Jewish religious groups has dropped from around 200 to 160.

He rejects as "a barefaced lie" assertions "by champions of Judaism abroad" that there is an insufficient number of synagogues to meet demands for them. He also dismisses claims that there are too few rabbis as a result of no teaching facilities. The real reason, according to Prof. Shapiro, is that very few Jews wish to become rabbis.

In order to prove that the opportunities are there for aspiring rabbis, Prof. Shapiro mentions the Moscow Yeshiva. However, western observers have noted that there has been no indication of any graduations from this Yeshiva in recent years. In fact, earlier this year it was reported that Adolf Shayevich, a Jew from the USSR, had completed rabbinical training at the Jewish theological school in Budapest, and was appointed assistant to the chief rabbi in Moscow.

Prof. Shapiro admits that Jewish religious literature is not published in the USSR; but rationalizes this by saying that there is nobody to write such works, and very few who would be able to read them in any case. Prof. Shapiro is a philosopher, who has written in the Soviet press and spoken on the radio about the situation of religious Jews in the USSR.

KNS #112 12/12/80

Seven American religious leaders representing the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry recently returned from the Madrid Conference on European Security & Cooperation where they publicly pressed the Soviet Union to comply with the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act. The group also went on to Rome for a series of meetings with Vatican officials.

While in Madrid the delegation, led by the Task Force's Executive Director, Sister Ann Gillen of Chicago and Rabbi of New York City A. James Rudin, Assistant National Interreligious Affairs Director of the American Jewish Committee, presented a six point position paper to the ambassadors of the 35 nations who are meeting in the Spanish capital to review the compliance and implementation of the Act their governments signed in 1975. The Interreligious Task Force's six points were:

- 1 The right of Soviet Jews to emigrate freely and without harassment to Israel and other lands of freedom
- 2 An immediate end to the current official virulent Soviet campaign of anti-Semitism
- 3 The right of Western Jews and Christians to meet freely with their co-religionists in the USSR.
4. The right of Soviet parents to instruct their children under the age of 18 in their religious traditions.
5. The guarantee that houses of worship in the Soviet Union will be adequate in number and will be properly maintained.
6. The right of every Soviet citizen to be employed and an end to "economic parasitism" trials.

All these ~~rights~~ points are part of the Helsinki Final Act and other international agreements signed by the Soviet Union.

The Interreligious Task Force had constructive official meetings with the delegations from Denmark, Sweden, West Germany, and the United States. The group also had unofficial meetings with several other nations as well.

"In all our meetings we documented the dismal human rights record of the Soviet Union since the last compliance meeting in Belgrade three years ago. We urged the Western nations to continue their policy of pointing out the consistent failure of the USSR to comply with the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Act. We were especially pleased that specific names of Prisoners of Conscience and other activists were publicly mentioned by the U.S., Sweden, the United Kingdom, and other nations at the Madrid Conference. It is absolutely vital to put a human face on a sometimes abstract principle of human rights," said Rabbi Rudin.

The Interreligious Task Force also sent a delegation to the 1977 Belgrade compliance meeting. "Three years ago only seven names were publicly mentioned, and only the U.S. named those names. In 1980 nearly 30 names have been mentioned by at least ^{three} ~~four~~ nations. This is a significant step forward", the Rabbi declared

Sister Gillen asserted: "We urged the diplomats at Madrid to work for the release of all the Soviet Jewish Prisoners of Conscience including Anatoly Schransky, Victor Brailovsky, Ida Nudel, Vladimir Slepak, and for the release of the seven Christian Pentecostals who have been living in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow for the past two years. We called for an end to the exile of Andrei Shāharov, and the freeing of the last three prisoners from the 1970 Leningrad trials: two

Christians, Yuri Federov & Alexi Murzenko, and a Jew, Josef Mendelevich. The process by which the 35 ~~signatories~~ governments that signed the Helsinki Act come together to evaluate their compliance with the Act is a unique and important instrumentality. We need to use it as means of holding the Soviets' feet to the human rights fire."

In Madrid the Interreligious Task Force members met with the half sister of the Swedish diplomat, Raoul Wallenberg, who has been missing since his capture by the Soviets in Hungary in 1944. Wallenberg was then in Budapest working to save the lives of Jews during World War II. He is believed to still be alive in a Soviet prison camp.

The Task Force also conferred with members of the 14 ~~member~~ ^{MEMBER} American ~~personnel~~ ^{personnel} Congressional delegation that was in Madrid representing the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, a U.S. Government agency.

At the Vatican, the Task Force members met with Msgr. Jorge Mejia, the Director of the Office on Catholic-Jewish Relations, Msr William Murphy, the Director of the Pontifical Commission on Justice & Peace, and with a ~~member~~ representative of the Department of Public Affairs of the Secretariat of State. The Vatican is a signatory to the Helsinki Act, and the issues of human rights and religious liberty were fully discussed.

Other members of the Task Force delegation included: Sister Ann Marie Erst of Chicago and a member of the Irish Bishops' Commission on Justice & Peace, the Rev. Dr. William R. Phillippe, a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches of Geneva & Pastor of the Bower Hill Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, the Rev. Dr. John Radano, Professor of Theology, Seton Hall University of S. Orange, N.J., Professor Charles Z. Smith of the University of Washington Law School and a past'

president of the American Baptist Churches, and the Rev. Dr. John F. Steinbruck, Pastor of the Luther Place Memorial Church of Washington, D.C.

The National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry was founded in 1972, and it brings Roman Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, Eastern Orthodox, and Jews together to work in support of ^{oppressed} Soviet Jews and Christians.

