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CHRISTIANS ISSUE 'CALL TO CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE' FROM BRUSSELS. The delegation of Christian leaders attending Brussels II, accepted the 'Call to Christian Conscience' prepared by the Task Force and issued the following statement:

IMPORTANCE OF THREE NEW GROUPS AT THE SECOND WORLD CONFERENCE IN BRUSSELS. In 1971, 700 Jewish leaders met at Brussels I to launch a world wide campaign to free Soviet Jews. Five years later, Brussels II drew 1,500 persons from over 30 countries to continue this Exodus from the USSR. In each case the date was chosen to dramatize an international dialogue. The call for freedom sounded from the West immediately before the meeting of the Soviet Supreme Praesidium. According to Dr. Andre LaCocque (Co-Chairperson of the National Inter-religious Task Force on Soviet Jewry) Brussels II was a success even before it began, judging from the international press accounts of reactions from the USSR and several Arab countries. The message had already been anticipated and attempts were underway to subvert its impact in the forum of world opinion.

The participation of three new groups made Brussels II historic:

1) SOVIET JEWS. The long procession of Soviet Jews entering the first plenary session was doubly symbolic: They are part of the great exodus of over 100,000 who have left the USSR, and the 100,000 who have already received invitations to join their families in Israel but who are still caught in the complexities, caprices and cruelties of the Soviet system. From relatives of imprisoned Soviet Jews came the urgent cry for help to free their loved ones from unjust detention, hunger, isolation, and the resulting depression. Sylva Zalmanson, who must wait 10 long years for a family reunion with her imprisoned husband and brothers, pleaded for help for both Jewish and Christian prisoners. The Adopt-A-Family system was urged as a means of giving courage to all who seek to leave the USSR.

Jews in the Soviet Union were not silent at Brussels II. From them came a courageous message signed by a long list of persons willing to give their lives in the cause of freedom, bearing witness that it is Jews in the USSR who seek aliyah who are renewing Jewish religious identity in its basic dimension.

2) UNITED STATES POLITICAL LEADERS. The personal participation of members of the U.S. Congress gave real substance to the message of good will from President Gerald Ford, indicating "the solidarity of the American people with the efforts to enlarge human freedom by the participants of the Second Brussels Conference, February 17-19" (in the words of a concurrent Congressional resolution). From the U.S. House of Representatives came Congressmen Drinan, Eilberg, Fish, Hebert, and Peyser. Senator Frank Church said to the plenary session, "If the U.S. government fails, the outcry must come from the U.S. Senate." The one-line message was: WE WILL NOT RETREAT!!

Civil rights leader Bayard Rustin, an honorary co-sponsor of the Task Force, said, "Freedom is a flame which rises up and falls from time to time." His singing of the spiritual, "Let My People Go," linked the civil rights and human rights struggles with stirring effect.
3) CHRISTIANS FROM THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. Brussels II was an inter-religious assembly through the participation of a large Christian delegation coordinated by the Task Force on Soviet Jewry. Sr. Ann Gillen, director of the Task Force, presented the Call to Christian Conscience which was accepted by the Christians there and given to Golda Meir and the plenary session as a pledge of continued Christian commitment to this human rights cause.

Christians participating in the Brussels II Conference reflect the broad spectrum of Church support for Soviet Jewry. Leaders of the institutional church spoke by the presence of the following: Rev. Rufus Cornelison (Philadelphia Metropolitan Council of Christian Ministries); Rev. Charles Devlin (Philadelphia Cardinal's Commission of Human Relations); Monsignors Bernard Gerhardt and Ralph Kuehner (Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, DC); Dr. Thomas Fahy (President of Seton Hall University of New Jersey); Mr. Walter Hubbard (President of the National Organization of Black Catholics) from Seattle, WA; Rev. William Weiler (Director of Jewish/Christian Relations of the National Council of Churches); Rev. Paul Stagg (General Secretary of the New Jersey Council of Churches); and Dr. David Hunter (Council on Religion and International Affairs) of New York City.

The Belgian bishops were represented by the Rev. Luc Dequeker; the Sisters of Sion by M. Helene Fournier; the Irish Commission on Justice and Peace by Sr. Ann Marie Erst; the English Methodists by Lord Donald Soper; and the International Council of Christians and Jews by Dr. Charles Favre. Mr. Eugene DuBow represented the Chicago Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, and through a gracious ecumenical gesture, his expenses were partially subvented by the School Sisters of Notre Dame (an order of Catholic nuns).

CHRISTIAN DELEGATION MEETS WITH GOLDA MEIR. At the special meeting of the Christian delegation with Mrs. Meir, Sr. Ann Gillen thanked Mrs. Meir (Honorary President of the Assembly) for including the special meeting in an already overburdened schedule, saying, "You have won respect, admiration, and affection in the USA, in Israel, and all over the world by your heroic leadership. Your personal concern for Soviet Jews has deep roots that were implanted when you were Israeli Ambassador to the USSR, and in a sense, it is because of that concern that we are all here in Brussels. We are here to pledge to you our commitment to this human rights cause, and as a sign of this commitment, may I present to you a copy of this 'Call to Christian Conscience' which we have affirmed here in Brussels. We look forward to continued cooperation in the whole area of civil, religious and human rights.

Accepting the 'Call to Christian Conscience,' Mrs. Meir replied, "I am a person who in a long life time has done so much talking but there are moments when one has a real medium for the expression of what we feel. Since you know as much about the history of the sufferings
of the Jewish people as I do, I will say that I am very anxious for the welfare of our children to see that our dialogue with the non-Jewish world (sometimes very, very cruel and dangerous for us) should not be the only dialogue with the non-Jewish world. Just as there has never been a period of history when we were entirely free of torture, massacre, holocaust, we want to be able to say to our people that there has never been a period when non-Jews failed to stand by our side. The world cannot be good as long as there is one spot where injustice, discrimination, and religious hatred are permitted and accepted. In all periods of this kind, whether done to my people or others for color or race, there are two elements that are tragic but not equal in response: Those who perpetrate all the horrors; and those who remain silent. In modern times when they haven't the courage nor the conviction for right and wrong, the easiest way is to abstain.

Ordinarily, I would say "thank you," but I cannot about a cause of this kind because I know that you have made it your own. I praise God also in these hours that we are not left alone. Just as we are found together today, so also somewhere, someplace, may we meet again when we have won."

THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE.

Members of the Christian delegation participated in a special press conference at which the 'Call to Christian Conscience' was publicized. Bayard Rustin later told reporters (who pressed for "hard news"), "Don't undervalue the power of conscience as a religious experience. When Rosa Parks sat down in the white section of a Southern bus, she was responding to conscience, and her act started a whole civil rights struggle."

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INTERRELIGIOUS COMMISSION MEETING.

...Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg and Rabbi David Hill, moderators, both spoke movingly about their being survivors of Holocaust families, expressing the wish that there had been such groups meeting in the 1940's.

...Lord Donald Soper, British Methodist, said, "No Christian could ever make adequate atonement for the sufferings and the enormities inflicted on the Jewish people in the past -- but, in the name of the Church, I beg your pardon!" (The tremendous applause following was, no doubt, inspired in part by Christians who wish their own Church leaders would follow Lord Soper's example in the work of reconciliation.)

...Pere Michel Riquet, France, spoke at length about "the shining example" of the Jewish people in their concern for the freedom of Soviet Jews, of the courage of the Soviet Jews themselves, and about all of this as signs of their fidelity and of the Divine response in fidelity, too. He said that Christians have much to learn from this movement to help Soviet Jews, asking why similar movements have not been organized by Christians for other Christians when their human rights are denied. Both Pere Riquet and Pere Braun represented Christians who had suffered with the Jewish people during the time of Hitler.

...Sr. Margaret Traxler, Director of the Institute of Women Today and Co-Chairperson of the Task Force, spoke about the foresight of the American Jewish Committee and the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice in organizing the Task Force in 1972 - immediately after Brussels I.
Mr. Walter Hubbard, President of the National Organization of Black Catholics, who was President of the NCCIJ in 1972, remarked, "If the oppressed do not understand the oppressed, who will?"

At the Interreligious Commission meeting, Rev. John Steinbruck, Minister of Luther Place Memorial Church in Washington, DC, and Rev. Robert Pruitt of the AME Zion Church in Washington invited persons to attend or to hold special liturgical interracial and interreligious breaking of bread outside the Soviet Embassy in the United States and in other countries as an Easter dawn ceremony, inviting Soviet officials to attend as a sign of their willingness to let Soviet Jews leave.

Dr. Thomas Bird, Professor of Slavic Languages at Queens College, CUNY, New York, reported on the Helsinki Agreement (recommending the use of Stephen Roth's booklet explaining the Helsinki Agreement, the Freedom Watch of Freedom House in New York, and the monitoring legislation introduced by Representative Millicent Fenwick in the U.S. Congress. Dr. Bird noted that the World Council of Churches, when it met in Nairobi, had urged member churches to help in this monitoring of compliance with the Helsinki Agreement.

Professor Bird translated the 'Call' into Russian, and Professor LaCocque into French for distribution among Russian and French speaking groups. Delegates were asked to distribute the Call widely in their own countries, presenting the document to religious and political leaders for their signatures. According to the plan, the signatures would be returned to the Task Force Office, 1307 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605, for final compilation and publication.

Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg stressed the need to focus especially on the right of free association for Jews in the USSR and their right to choose their own leaders, urging these same rights for the Christian communities in the Soviet Union.

There was general agreement that international interreligious cooperation for human rights should have high priority, both to foster the cause of human rights and to combat the vicious anti-Semitism which comes from the USSR and other lands.

Rabbi Israel Moshwitz said that all religions suffer from ineptness and moral inadequacy in these times, and that such cooperation for human rights would do much to revitalize religion itself.

Dr. Andre LaCocque expressed conviction that we are now ending one era and entering another - one which sees an end to oppression and the beginning of real happiness. "A regime which oppresses cannot last," he stated.

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COMMENDATION OF BELGIAN GOVERNMENT. During the Brussels II meeting, a group of women from England who call themselves the "35's" (because they organized originally in groups of 35 to help free a 35-year-old librarian, Raissa Palatnik) went to see Queen Fabiola of the Belgians. One of their members, a little child, presented the Queen with a bouquet of 35 roses in gratitude to the Belgians for their courage in hosting the Brussels meeting. The Belgian government is not oil-sufficient, yet it withstood pressures by the USSR and several Arab governments which opposed the meeting. Extraordinary security measures were taken all throughout the conference to prevent any dangerous incident. A special reception for the delegates was held in the City Hall. All agreed that the Belgian Government deserves the highest commendation for its courage and its courtesy to the delegates.
BRUSSELS II DECLARATION.

On the final night of the Conference, at a gala held to include the Brussels Jewish community, the Brussels II Declaration was read in five languages. This dramatic dialogue of World Jewry with Soviet Jews is a message of great family feeling, which says, in part:

We are with you in your struggle. . . We share your faith. . . We honor your courage. You are not alone! Together we work towards the same future; identify with the same experiences; respond to the same memories. The Jewish destiny which unites us is one and inseparable; our common tradition indestructible.

We salute those from every sector of society, every race and religion -- in government, parliament, science, law, education, the arts, labour, commerce and industry -- who have joined with us in the cause of the Jews of the USSR. We have the right and the duty to say to them, a generation after the Holocaust, that they dare not remain silent in face of the renewed threats confronting the Jewish people. History has taught that these threats imperil human rights everywhere. We abhor and we condemn anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, whether under the guise of prejudice towards the Jewish religion or false accusations against Israel and Zionism.

We state that the equation of Zionism and racism by the Government of the Soviet Union and other regimes is a calumny against Israel and against Jews everywhere. Those who exploit this mockery of truth give aid and comfort to the enemies of liberty, peace, justice, and human brotherhood.

We have listened to the messages of our brethren in the Soviet Union, declaring their determination to emigrate to Israel and follow the 100,000 Jews from the Soviet Union who have succeeded in reaching the Jewish State. We proclaim our faith and pride in their fortitude, which adds new depths to the Jewish spirit. . . We declare that for the sake of our brethren in the Soviet Union, we shall not remain silent nor shall we hold our peace.

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RECOMMENDED:


Letters of the Prisoners for Zion. Letters from the Jewish Prisoners of Conscience, translated into English. $2.00 each plus 25¢ postage. Available at: Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, 200 West 72nd Street, Suite 30, New York, NY 10023.


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