



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

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MEMORANDUM

July 29, 1992

TO: HA - Ambassador Bishop  
FROM: HA - George Lister ✓  
SUBJECT: Nonviolence Discussion

Yesterday I was invited to participate in a luncheon discussion at a private home in Northwest Washington. Attendance came to around a dozen. I believe the main organizer of the event was Philip Bogdonoff, of Nonviolence International. Among the others were Jorgen Johansen (Norwegian) and Christine Schweitzer (German), of War Resisters' International, Mitra Lore (Iranian) of Mideast 2000, and Ali Jivad, also Iranian. Johansen said he had recently served several days in an Israeli prison, following a nonviolent protest march. The conversation was lively and candid, and I stayed for almost two hours. Much of the discussion concerned human rights, and included some common misconceptions regarding USG policy. At one point I was able to make a brief statement along the following lines.

I congratulate you on your interest in human rights. There is absolutely nothing wrong with criticizing USG human rights performance, so long as you get it approximately correct. The USG needs accurate, constructive criticism. But you are badly mistaken in assuming that our policy has deteriorated since the Carter Administration. For example, I suggest you compare our current Human Rights Reports with those prepared during 1977-81. I feel our Reports have been getting better every year. Also, try to keep your criticism at the same high level of honesty you expect from the USG. Then you can make an important contribution. The truth is that our human rights policy is very good, and has had a very positive impact on our overall foreign policy. But, of course, our human rights performance is far from perfect, for one thing because this is not work which can be done with computers, but must depend on imperfect human beings. Candid dialogue, such as this meeting, is absolutely essential.

Bogdonoff told me today that the reaction to the discussion had been very positive, and he thanked me for what he considered an excellent contribution. I recommended that we continue the dialogue, and Phil agreed.