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Human Rights -- Key to Russian-American Relations

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It is hard for me to believe that I am actually back in Moscow, after a very long absence, to deliver a series of speeches on human rights. I welcome this extraordinary opportunity because I know from long experience the importance of candid dialogue. I hope we will try to make the most of this opportunity and listen to each other carefully, regardless of whether we all agree on everything. I will make only my opening remarks in Russian, which I hope you will understand, and then I will take your questions, comments and criticism through our interpreter. I will try to keep my opening statement brief in order to leave ample time for discussion.

Speaking as one who was involved with our human rights policy from its beginning, I want to explain that policy, how it operates, and some of its problems, and to emphasize why I am convinced that the human rights cause provides the key to building Russian-American cooperation and friendship. Let me begin with one anecdote. With the great improvement in our relations many more visitors are coming from your country, and several months ago I attended a meeting with a group of Russians who had come to see Ambassador Richard Schifter, the head of our Human Rights Bureau in the State Department. One of the visitors remarked that many Americans had been asking him how the U.S. could help Russia, and he, the visitor, wanted to know how Russians could help Americans. I thought the question was very



appropriate, and I would like to give you my opinion. If Russians can develop a democratic society, based on protection of human rights for all, you will have helped us enormously, as well as yourselves. Then there can be peaceful cooperation between Russians and Americans which will yield great benefits to both our societies. As just one example, if your country becomes a stable democracy, the savings in American and Russian military expenditures should help to raise both of our living standards considerably.

Now there are some who see the end of the Cold War as an American victory over Russians. I think that is nonsense. The end of the Cold War was a victory for human rights supporters around the world, including those heroic human rights activists in Russia who, over the years, have struggled and died in oblivion, as well as those courageous men and women who confronted the tanks at the Russian Federation Building in Moscow last August. Of course I realize very well that the construction of a stable democracy is not an easy task. It is a long and complicated process and the Russian people are beset by many problems, including a hard and painful winter and an urgent economic crisis. Much misery and disappointment lie ahead. And there will always be those who will call for a right-wing or left-wing dictatorship as a quick and easy solution to all these



difficulties. But if the Russian people persevere and support human rights and democracy, we will have a wonderful opportunity to help each other and to build a better world.

Now for a few words on the origins of our human rights policy. Many Americans assume that our current policy began during the Administration of President Carter, 1976-80, but actually the policy started before Carter. During 1973-74 our Congress held a series of public hearings on the role of human rights in our foreign policy, and among those called on to testify were State Department officials, scholars, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, and many others. As a result of those hearings, in March 1974, a Congressional report was issued urging that a higher priority be accorded human rights in our foreign policy.

So the human rights cause was gaining ground before Jimmy Carter, the Democratic Party candidate, won our 1976 Presidential elections. But of course once Carter assumed office, human rights began to receive more attention in our daily foreign policy, and a separate Bureau of Human Rights was created in the State Department. Naturally there were many problems at the outset, including lack of experience, inadequate information and reference material, and skepticism and resistance inside our bureaucracy. But after a year or two we began to make