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@Raoul WALLENBERG and Vilmos LANGENFELDER

£Russian Federation

Amnesty International is concerned that Raoul Wallenberg's disappearance after his arrest in Hungary in January 1945 by Soviet forces has never been adequately clarified. Raoul Wallenberg worked in the Swedish Legation in Budapest, where he provided Swedish passports to many hundreds of Hungarian Jews and enabled them to escape transportation to Nazi concentration camps. Amnesty International is also seeking evidence on the fate of Raoul Wallenberg's driver Vilmos Langenfelder, who was arrested with him.

Reports of what happened to Raoul Wallenberg after his arrest have been contradictory. In February 1945 the Soviet Ambassador to Sweden told the Swedish authorities that he was in Soviet custody. In Hungary in March 1945 it was announced (probably by a Soviet radio station broadcasting in Russian) that Raoul Wallenberg had been murdered by Hungarian fascists, or "agents of the Gestapo". In August 1947 the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied that Raoul Wallenberg had ever been in Soviet custody and said his case was unknown to the Soviet authorities. For 10 years this assertion was repeated by Soviet officials in answer to queries from individuals and organizations. In February 1957, however, Andrey Gromyko, the then Deputy Foreign Minister of the USSR, issued a statement that Raoul Wallenberg had died of a heart attack in Lubyanka prison in Moscow on 17 July 1947.

Since 1945 there have been more than 20 alleged "sightings" of Raoul Wallenberg in imprisonment in the former USSR, some of them reported as late as the 1980s. Some of these sightings were partial or based on hearsay and others have been mutually contradictory. Amnesty International has never been able to corroborate any of these alleged sightings through a second source.

For many years representations from Raoul Wallenberg's family, the Swedish Government and other concerned organizations and individuals elicited little response, nor any documents to clarify the case. However, in October 1989 Raoul Wallenberg's family and the Swedish Raoul Wallenberg Committee, were invited to Moscow by the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At a meeting with Deputy Ministers of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the Committee for State Security (KGB), they were handed a number of items connected with Raoul Wallenberg's case. These included a report on his purported death on 17 July 1947 and his cremation, written by Dr A. Smoltsov, then head of medical services at the KGB Lubyanka Prison; a diplomatic passport; two identification documents; two food ration cards; notebooks; a sum of money in American, Swiss, Swedish and Hungarian currency and a number of personal items. Three days later officials gave them a prison registration file, dated 6 February 1945, which they claimed had been discovered only since the family had arrived in the USSR. On 23 October the family was taken to Vladimir Prison and allowed to examine archives there. Numerous alleged sightings of Raoul Wallenberg have been reported from Vladimir Prison in past decades.

In August-September 1990 an international commission of experts, headed by Irwin Cotler, a Canadian lawyer greatly experienced in human rights work, was allowed to visit the Soviet Union. While there members of the commission were able to visit Vladimir prison, where a number of reports had alleged that Raoul Wallenberg was being held in the 1950s. They were given access to all prisoner files in Vladimir prison, but failed to find any concrete evidence to show that Raoul Wallenberg had ever been held there. During their research they discovered that all the dossiers of foreign prisoners were at one stage transferred from Vladimir to KGB files in Moscow. Although the KGB had initially promised full cooperation, this was apparently not forthcoming. The Human Rights Committee of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic as the Russian Federation was then known) manifested an interest in the commission's work and sent a member to assist them.

In September 1991 the new USSR head of the Committee for State Security (KGB), Vadim Bakatin, handed over a further five documents relating to the case to the Swedish authorities. These included a military report alluding to Raoul Wallenberg's arrest, a list of persons arrested on 6 February 1945, an extract of a letter by a German officer held in the same prison as Raoul Wallenberg, filed in 1949, and a report by a diplomat in Budapest on Raoul Wallenberg's activities. Also among the documents was a KGB note dated 2 March 1948 stating that Raoul Wallenberg died in 1947. Vadim Bakatin admitted that the documents did not shed any further light on the case, but said that the search would continue in KGB archives for more information. He also pledged to lift the vow of silence preventing retired KGB officers and prison officers from divulging what they know about Raoul Wallenberg's fate. In November and December additional records with a bearing on Raoul Wallenberg's fate came to light, particularly regarding the chronology of his time in prison. These reveal that he was taken from Budapest, where he had been arrested, to Lefortovo prison in Moscow at the beginning of February 1945. The dates of individual interrogations were also specified. A record dated 2 March 1947 had also been found reporting the transfer of Wallenberg's belongings to the internal prison of the Ministry of State Security.

Although AI sought for many years to discover the fate of Raoul Wallenberg and his chauffeur from the Soviet authorities, in the wake of the break-up of the USSR it is now focussing its inquiries on the authorities of the Russian Federation. It hopes that renewed requests for information in the year that Raoul Wallenberg would be celebrating his 80th birthday may bring concrete results. The likelihood of the now 74-year-old Dmitry Kopylansky, one of Raoul Wallenberg's reported KGB interviewers and the only known surviving witness, revealing more on the fate of the Swedish diplomat and his driver is very small. However, it is still possible that some key paper might be found in other archives or other witnesses might appear as happened over the mass murder of Polish officers at Katyn.