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## **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Manifesto for the “Ideology of human rights”**

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It is a great honour to speak with you on this occasion of the anniversary of Andrey Dmitrievich Sakharov, and bring you greetings on behalf of more than one million members of Amnesty International in over 100 countries around the world.

When Amnesty International was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1977, the citation recognized our work “opposing degradation, violence and torture” as essential to building “liberty, justice and peace”. So you can understand why we have a strong sense of fellowship with the legacy and commitment of Andrey Dmitrievich Sakharov.

Six billion! Six billion of us live on this planet. A planet so rich and diverse, a planet which has sustained the livelihoods of billions and billions of human beings throughout history. For some it has been a life of riches, for many a life of rags. For some it has been a long and very fulfilled life, for others life has been short and at times brutal. For all those who have suffered and endured servitude and deprivation, other human beings, and not the forces of nature, have been their greatest tormentors.

This is still true today.

Almost 50 years ago, in 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asserting that ALL fundamental rights belong to ALL people, and that ALL governments are bound to promote and protect those rights. Only eight governments from the entire world did not vote for the adoption of the Universal Declaration. One of them was the Soviet Union.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, born out of the ashes of World War II was the “humanist” response to the cries of the victims of Auschwitz and Nagasaki. The holocaust and the nuclear bomb established that mankind had achieved the technological capacity to destroy humanity AND the planet, and its readiness to do so. “Never again” wrote the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To prevent war and destruction, to guarantee peace and justice international and national social orders had to be founded on human rights everywhere. The world needed to pursue the dual objectives of freedom from fear and freedom from want, for all, at once and concurrently.

There was one man who went even further in dreaming the impossible dream of the mankind: to create a just and free world for all. “All people have the right to life, freedom and happiness”, wrote Andrey Dmitrievich Sakharov in his draft Constitution of the Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia.

And he had a vision how to achieve all three of them.

In his “Memoirs” in 1983 he wrote: “Influenced by Lusia, and my colleagues and friends, I have devoted more and more attention to individual victims of injustice. I support Amnesty International’s call for the release of prisoners of conscience everywhere, as well as its efforts to end the death penalty and the use of torture. I am convinced that only an “ideology of human rights” can unite people without regard to nationality, political convictions, religion, or social status”.

The world today has still a long way to go in realizing Andrey Sakharov’s idea for the creation of a World’s Government based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Andrey Dmitrievich was also a big friend and supporter of Amnesty International. He was adopted by Amnesty as a prisoner of conscience and Amnesty groups from Norway to Nigeria had campaigned for his release from forced exile.

His ideas and campaigns established the beginning of the Russian human rights movement. Thirty years ago in 1968, he published his political masterpiece -the essay “Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom, which set the scene for the creation of a human rights movement in the Soviet Union, and for the first time alerted the readers in the West and around the world about the terror of the Soviet regime. Almost at the same time with the publication of Sakharov’s essay, members of his closest circle of friends and supporters issued the samizdat Chronicle of Current Events. Some of them formed in Moscow the first Amnesty group in Eastern Europe. Ten years ago in October 1988, Andrey Dmitrievich and his friends from the human rights movement founded one of the most important today Russian human rights organizations, the Memorial Society, and Sakharov became its first chairman.

On 11 December 1975, in the acceptance speech of his Nobel Prize for Peace, which he was not allowed by the Soviet authorities to receive in person, Andrey Dmitrievich wrote: “We must fight against injustice and the violation of human rights for every individual person separately. Much of our future depends on this.” At the very moment when these words were read in front of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in Oslo by his wife, Elena Georgievna Bonner, Andrey Sakharov stood for a second day of vigil outside the doors of the courtroom of the Lithuanian Supreme Court, where Sergey Kovalyov was on trial for his involvement with the samizdat *Chronicle of Current Events*, and for being one of the founders of the first Amnesty International’s group in the Soviet Union.

Thirty years ago, on 30 April 1968, Sergey Kovalyov and a group of dissidents released the first issue of the Chronicle of Current Events. This samizdat (self-published) journal was circulated from hand to hand, often being re-typed on the chain-letter principle. In February 1971, starting with No. 16 through No. 64, Amnesty International had published English translations of the Chronicle as they appeared and had disseminated them around the world.

1968 was pronounced by the United Nations as a Year of Human Rights in the world to mark the 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the Soviet Union, where even the mentioning of the words “human rights” meant years of imprisonment in the GULAG labour camps, searches and daily intimidation, a group of human rights defenders and dissidents around Andrey Sakharov, wrote on the title page of the first issue of the Chronicle: “Year of Human Rights in the Soviet Union”.

After five issues the editors of the Chronicle announced that “The Year of Human Rights Continues: There is no single member of this movement who could consider that the Year of Human Rights has ended. The Chronicle will continue to be issued in 1969”. Thirty years later, President Boris Yeltsin proclaimed 1998 as a Year of Human Rights in the Russian Federation to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For us at Amnesty International, similarly to the

editors of the Chronicle 30 years ago, it is clear even before December 1998 that the Year of Human Rights in the Russian Federation must continue.

Because the Russian Federation remains a country where serious and widespread human rights violations occur, both in peace-time and during the armed conflict in the Chechen Republic. When the country became a member of the Council of Europe in February 1996 the government engaged in a major effort to demonstrate that it had improved its human rights record. There have been many important initiatives, but too often the facts tell a different story: torture and ill-treatment continue in police custody, in prisons and in the armed forces during peace-time; prison conditions are inhumane; prisoners of conscience remain detained or others, like Aleksandr Nikitin from St Petersburg are released on restrictive conditions and are awaiting trial; refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons are not given adequate protection; prisoners are still facing the death penalty; conscientious objectors to military service continues to face imprisonment instead of receiving alternative civilian service; thousands of civilians became victims of indiscriminate killings, torture and extrajudicial executions by the Russian federal army during the conflict in the Chechen Republic –little if any investigations into these violations, leading to prosecutions, have taken place since the end of the conflict.

I wonder, what would have Andrey Dmitrievich said today about the protection of human rights in the Russian Federation and around the world, if he had a chance to be among us on his 77th birthday?

I believe he would have said the same words which he had said all along:

On the death penalty in a letter to Amnesty International in September 1977: “I regard the death penalty as a savage, immoral institution which undermines the ethical and legal foundations of a society. The state... assumes the right to the most terrible and irreversible act –the taking of human life. I reject the notion that the death penalty has any real deterrent effect whatsoever on potential criminals. I am convinced that the contrary is true –that savagery begets only savagery”.

Almost 50 years on after the adoption of the Universal Declaration, where are we? 1.3 billions human beings survive with less than a dollar a day, 35,000 children die everyday of malnutrition and preventable diseases, words that we thought had disappeared from our vocabulary, haunt our daily conscience: genocide, ethnic cleansing, gang rape. The ugly face of armed conflicts dominate the reality of hundreds of millions of people in 30 countries –one nation out of six! In most of these wars the enemy is not necessarily an armed combatant, but rather ‘the other’. The one with a different faith, or a different ethnic identity: the approach is to first dehumanize the enemy, so that the language of rights no longer apply, then “seek and destroy”. In some societies “at peace” the same logic is too often applied to criminal suspects and migrants from poorer nations or “others”.

Protection and promotion of human rights is not just a moral imperative. It is, as explicitly stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the foundation of freedom, justice and peace. For all of us six billion inhabitants of the earth, social and economic development is only sustainable in the long term if it enhances the dignity of all, if it secures the equal right of men and women, if it provides for decent standards of living and greater freedoms.

The world today has the resources and the knowhow to achieve these goals. The future therefore does not have to be one of chaos and misery.

In 1948, a new “ideology”, different than any previous ideologies, was created with a manifesto called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With it we are facing the right direction, all we have to do

now is to keep on walking. And this is precisely what human rights defenders throughout the world are doing and Amnesty International has committed itself to accompany and protect them. What about you?

This is our planet, for all six billion people. But a human right denied to some ultimately puts us all at risk. To echo the words of Mahatma Gandhi: *“Be the change you want to see in the world”*. ENDS.../