

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Amnesty International remembers Yelena Bonner

Members and staff of Amnesty International around the world send their condolences to the family and friends of Yelena Georgievna Bonner, the widow of Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov, who died on 18 June 2011 in Boston, USA.

For several decades, Yelena Bonner was an ardent and effective defender of those whose rights had been violated in the Soviet Union and later in Russia and elsewhere. Together with her husband, she appealed to the Soviet authorities but also to the international community, to protect the right to freedom of expression, to end torture and the death penalty. After Andrei Sakharov's death in 1989, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, she continued to campaign relentlessly against injustice and oppression, help countless victims of human rights violations.

Yelena Bonner was a friend and supporter of Amnesty International. She could be a harsh critic too, but she was always a fair one, willing to listen and generous with her time and assistance.

In his "Memoirs" in 1983 Andrei Sakharov, the Soviet nuclear physicist and dissident, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his human rights activities, wrote:

"Influenced by Lusia [Yelena Bonner], 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".

In reply to birthday greetings sent to her by Amnesty International on her 85th birthday in 2008, Yelena Bonner wrote: "Thank you for the congratulations. Together with my gratitude I send my wish that Amnesty International continues to defend prisoners of conscience and that the organization's uncompromising defence of human rights without regard to leftist, rightist or any other political considerations will be an example for all human rights organizations on our small planet."

Yelena Bonner was always willing to take up unpopular positions without regard for her own reputation or the reputations of others. Silence in the face of injustice was never an option for her. She paid a high price for her belief in the universality of human rights and the obligation she felt to stand up for those rights. She was sent into internal exile and denied a normal life among friends and family for years but bore with considerable grace the sacrifices that her work and views imposed on her. She was at all times an example of the power of outspoken, unstinting individuals to achieve change.

We will remember her as a passionate, admonishing voice and an inspiration.

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