REPORT ON
NATIONAL INTERRELIGIOUS CONSULTATION ON SOVIET JEWRY
MARCH 19-20, 1972
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

- RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP

- SOLIDARITY DAY OBSERVANCES

Report on National Interreligious Consultation on Soviet Jewry
A Project of the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry

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PROGRAM

SUNDAY MARCH 19

6:00 P.M.

DINNER AND OPENING SESSION
Chairman:
Honorable R. SARGENT SHRIVER

GREETINGS
Rev. DANIEL BARRETT, Interim Executive Director,
Church Federation of Greater Chicago
Rev. EDWARD EGAN, Co-Chancellor, Archdiocese of Chicago
Rabbi MOSES MESCHELOFF, President, Chicago Board of
Rabbis

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES
Honorable CHARLES EVERS, Mayor, Fayette, Mississippi
Honorable RITA HAUSER, United States Ambassador to
the United Nations Commission on Human Rights

MONDAY MARCH 20

9:00 A.M. - 12:00 Noon

INFORMATION AND PLANNING SESSION
Chairman:
WALTER T. HUBBARD, SR., Seattle, Washington
Chairman of the Board, National Catholic Conference
for Interracial Justice
DR. THOMAS E. BIRD, Director of the Scholars' Program,
City University of New York (Queens)
BERNARD GWERTZMAN, Diplomatic Correspondent,
The New York Times
RICHARD MAASS, Chairman, National Conference on Soviet
Jewry

12:00 Noon - 1:30 P.M.

LUNCHEON
Chairman:
DR. ANDRE LACOCQUE, Professor of Old Testament,
Chicago Theological Seminary

ADDRESS
Representative ROBERT F. DRINAN, Member of Congress,
Third District, Massachusetts
1:30 P.M. - 2:30 P.M.

WORKSHOPS
Chairmen:
Sister ANN GILLEN, Houston, Texas, Director, Project Awareness. Program Associate, Houston Chapter, NCCJ
Rev. DAVID R. HUNTER, Deputy General Secretary, National Council of Churches, New York, New York
RICHARD H. LEVIN, Chairman, Chicago Chapter, American Jewish Committee, Chicago, Illinois

2:30 P.M. - 4:00 P.M.

CONCLUDING PLENARY SESSION
Chairman:
Sister MARGARET ELLEN TRAXLER, Executive Director, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, Chicago, Illinois

8:00 P.M.

INTERRELIGIOUS ASSEMBLY FOR SOVIET JEWRY
Auditorium - Holy Name Cathedral
Co-Sponsored by: National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry and Chicago Conference on Religion and Race

Chairman:
Rabbi ERNST LORGE, President, Chicago Conference on Religion and Race
Most Reverend FULTON J. SHEEN, Titular Archbishop of Newport
Rabbi MARC H. TANENBAUM, National Interreligious Affairs Director, American Jewish Committee
Rt. Rev. TIMOTHEOS, Bishop of Rodostolou, Representing His Eminence, Iakovos, Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America
Dr. CYNTHIA C. WEDEL, President, National Council of Churches
Rev. Dr. M. L. WILSON, Chairman, National Committee of Black Churchmen
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The National Interreligious Consultation on Soviet Jewry, held in Chicago March 19-20, was an unprecedented gathering of the nation's major Roman Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, Evangelical, and Jewish religious and civic leadership.

The Consultation grew out of a long relationship between the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice and the Interreligious Affairs Department and the Chicago regional office of the American Jewish Committee.

Several months ago Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, Executive Director of the NCCIJ, convened a group of leading Christians to discuss the need to sensitize and inform the Christian community concerning the problem of Soviet Jewry. National and regional AJC staff were invited to the discussion, and at this meeting plans were laid for the National Interreligious Consultation.

A Staff Task Force spent several months working with the planning group to develop the Consultation Program and to coordinate the details of a major national meeting. Ambassador Sargent Shriver agreed to serve as honorary national chairman, and requests for sponsorship sent over his name resulted in a roster of more than 40 prominent Americans, representing all shades of political opinion, government, the arts, education, sports and entertainment.

The Consultation succeeded in bringing together some 165 key institutional and academic personalities who met for a day-and-a-half at the University of Chicago.

By all standards, the Consultation was a landmark achievement, with some observers characterizing it as "a turning point" in building an interreligious coalition in support of Soviet Jewry and other groups in Russia.

The opening session featured a policy declaration of President Nixon's administration in support of the human rights of Soviet Jewry, including their right to emigrate to Israel. The policy statement which Mrs. Rita Hauser, former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Human Rights Commission and now vice-chairman of the campaign for the re-election of President Nixon, delivered was cleared with the White House and State Department. Mrs. Hauser expressed the commitment of the Administration to continue "pressing the Soviet Government
to let emigrate all those Jews who seek to leave on fair and humane terms." Ambassador Hauser also indicated that the U.S. government has aided Israel in the last fiscal year in the amount of 500 million dollars, and that "a substantial portion of this aid has been utilized for refugee resettlement," including Soviet Jews.

Mayor Charles Evers of Fayette, Miss., the first black to be elected mayor in a Southern city, declared that "it will be a disgrace if President Nixon on his forthcoming visit to the Soviet Union does not tell the Russian authorities to 'let the Jewish people go.'" In a moving address, Mayor Evers added, "I am here, all of you are here, because we care. I am proud to be a part of ending this oppression. I am also here because as one who remembers the Jewish participation in the Mississippi civil rights struggle, I do not forget those who helped me." Mr. Shlomo Shoham, a Soviet Jewish emigre who served for seven years in the Red Army and was interned in a labor camp from which he escaped through Siberia in order to reach Israel, told the conference how important it was that Christian voices speak out in behalf of Soviet Jewry.

Several U.S. Congressmen who had sponsored legislation for increased economic aid to Israel as well as to provide visas for Russian Jews who sought entrance to the United States were in attendance at this dinner meeting.

The opening session on the following morning featured presentations by Professor Thomas Bird, Director of the Scholars Program at the City University of New York; Richard Maass, president of the National Conference on Soviet Jews and former AJC Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman; and Bernard Gwertzman, diplomatic correspondent of The New York Times. Professor Bird, who is an authority on Slavic culture and on religion in the Soviet Union, presented a detailed analysis of the situation of various Christian and Muslim religious communities and contrasted the inferior status of the Jewish people and Judaism. Mr. Maass gave an informed account of the present discriminations against Soviet Jewry. Mr. Gwertzman recalled some of his personal and poignant experiences while he served as correspondent for The New York Times in Moscow. A lengthy question and answer period served to inform the delegates and to sensitize them to the issues about which they had previously only the skimpiest information.
The next major highlight of the conference was a stirring address by Congressman Robert Drinan, the first Jesuit priest to serve in Congress. Father Drinan urged "American Christians to be aroused at the injustices being inflicted on persons of the Jewish faith in Russia and called on American Christians to urge President Nixon to champion the cause of Soviet Jews when the President visits the Soviet Union in May." The Congressman also urged the Congress to enact the Soviet-Jewish Assistance Act of 1972 (HR 13002) which, he stated, was "absolutely essential if the United States is to help Israel with its most recent problems." Representative Robert Drinan electrified the assembly by announcing he would go to Israel in May, as a consultant to the Task Force, to talk with Soviet Jews who emigrated there.

A series of workshops were held during the afternoon that were devoted to brainstorming as to how Christians and Jews could mobilize more effectively their constituencies in support of the cause of Soviet Jewry. A complete report on the recommendations for follow-up follows, but these are several of the major recommendations which were voted unanimously by the conference delegates:

* An interreligious delegation should meet with President Nixon as early as possible to ask for his intercession with Soviet leaders on behalf of oppressed Soviet Jews when he visits Moscow in May.

* An interreligious delegation is to be sent to the Soviet Union to seek to visit political prisoners there.

* A permanent National Interreligious Secretariat on Soviet Jewry is to be established for the purpose of coordinating national and international programs.

* A National Consultation on Soviet Jewry is to be held within a year.

* Regional and local consultation modeled on this national conference are to be held within the coming year.

* The "Statement of Conscience" adopted unanimously by the conference is to be made available to all Christian and Jewish leadership throughout the country. (Copy of statement attached). Religious leaders will be asked to use this Statement of Conscience in connection with nation-wide observances of "Solidarity Day" on April 30.
It was agreed that the four conference co-chairmen - Sister Traxler, Professor LaCocque, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum and the Rev. Robert Stephanopoulos will make available a report on the conference proceedings that will include all the major recommendations voted by the delegates.

The climax of the conference was an Interreligious Assembly which was held Monday evening in the auditorium of the Holy Name Cathedral, which Cardinal Cody graciously made available to the sponsors. The Assembly featured talks by such prominent religious leaders as Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen; Rabbi Tanenbaum; Dr. M.L. Wilson, president of the National Committee of Black Churchmen; Dr. Cynthia Wedel, president of the National Council of Churches; and Dean Emanuel Vergis, representing Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Church of North and South America. Archbishop Sheen set the keynote for the packed assembly in declaring, "Every man has two or three critical moments in his life when he can save his soul. President Nixon had one such moment in China, and will have another like moment when he visits Russia. May the God of love inspire our President to plead for all the persecuted people in Russia even as we raise our voices against the persecution of the Russian Jews and other religious groups." The assembly concluded with the entire audience of about 700 people rising to their feet to signify their adoption of the Statement of Conscience. The interreligious assembly was preceded by a torchlight procession through the streets of Chicago. The enthusiastic, almost revival meeting atmosphere, was generated by freedom songs sung by a black Gospel choir and by Russian and Hebrew songs sung by the Soviet Jewish Caravan Group.

In evaluating the success of this "largest national interreligious assembly ever held for the cause of Soviet Jewry" (Religious News Service) it is evident that its primary importance derives from its obvious impact on the hundreds of religious leaders who were exposed to the problem. Beyond that, the extraordinary coverage in the press, radio and television in terms of communicating the message of Soviet Jewry and other deprived groups to public opinion and to political circles must be regarded an incalculable. Not only were major stories carried by The New York Times, all the Chicago newspapers, the Associated Press, the United Press, Religious News Service, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, National Catholic News Service, but was reported as well in Russian to the
Soviet Union by the Voice of America, Radio Liberty, and Kol Yisroel. With such an auspicious start, an enormous area has been opened for further program development which hopefully will constitute a major contribution to assuring the human rights of Soviet Jewry and all deprived religious and nationality groups.
RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

DOMESTIC SERVICE WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 1972

In addition to Rabbi Tanenbaum, the co-chairman of the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry that sponsored the consultation were Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, executive director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice and president of the National Coalition of American Nuns; Dr. Andre LaCocque, professor of Old Testament at Chicago Theological Seminary; and the Rev. Robert C. Stephanopolous, director of inter-church affairs for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America.

R. Sargent Shriver, former U.S. ambassador to France, was honorary chairman of the conference, but was unable to attend because of a commitment in France.
THE NATIONAL INTERRELIGIOUS CONSULTATION ON SOVIET JEWRY

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP

The "work" of the conference was done by four workshops headed by Sister Ann Gillen, executive secretary of the National Coalition of American Nuns; Thomas Gibbons, Officer, Federal Contract Compliance, U.S. Department of Labor; Rev. David R. Hunter, Deputy General Secretary, National Council of Churches; and Richard H. Levin, Chairman, Chicago Chapter, American Jewish Committee. These recommendations for implementation were adopted unanimously at the plenary session whose chairman was Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, executive director, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice.

The proposals for follow-up fell into three major categories:

A. Special Projects

B. Institutions and Structures

C. Information and Communications.

A. Special Projects: For immediate implementation

(1) The conference proposed that a high level interreligious delegation be appointed by the co-chairmen to meet with President Nixon before he leaves for the Soviet Union in mid-May. The delegation is authorized to present the "Statement of Conscience" to the President and to discuss with him how to best assure that America's concern over the human rights of Soviet Jewry and other groups are communicated effectively to Moscow. (Advice should be sought from the Appeal to Conscience Foundation and from the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.)

(2) An interreligious delegation is authorized to undertake a mission to the Soviet Union. It should seek permission to visit political prisoners in the USSR.

(3) Conference delegates should seek to introduce this human rights issue into the political debate of 1972.

(4) Copies of the "Statement of Conscience" should be sent to leaders of all Christian denominations, to authorities of the Soviet Union, the United Nations, the United States Government, to both political parties, and to heads of communist governments and communist parties in other parts of the world.
(5) Christians and Jews should be asked to participate fully in the "National Solidarity Day" observance on April 30. Adult and youth groups should be encouraged to take an active part. Delegates declare that a Christian witness is essential to making an impact on Soviet authorities. In giving maximum possible support to the cause of Soviet Jews, American people need to be informed that this would have constructive impact on the situation of other Soviet minorities, such as, Lithuanian Catholics, dissident Baptists, Jehovah Witnesses, etc.

(6) The 45 Methodist bishops, as an example, should communicate the sense of this conference to the USSR. They should seek to communicate with individual Russian Jews. Names and addresses will be provided by the conference sponsors.

(7) Delegates should make individual telephone calls to Russian Jews. Names and telephone numbers will be provided by conference sponsors.

(8) Local interreligious commissions should be established. Personal involvement is necessary. Local and regional interreligious meetings based on the model of this national conference should be organized for local involvement.

(9) Church groups should be encouraged to organize visits to the USSR. Information about such visits should be shared in advance with the conference Secretariat.

(10) A similar National Interreligious Conference should be held next year. Consideration should be given to organizing an interreligious coalition on human rights.

(11) With large numbers of young people travelling to the Soviet Union, plans should be made for briefing them on these human rights issues before their departure.

(12) Efforts should be made to introduce Yiddish broadcasts over the Voice of America.

(13) A mission should be undertaken to interpret this cause to the Ukrainians in the U.S.A. and Canada in view of the high level of anti-Semitism both here and in Russia.
B. Institutions and Structures

(1) The conference authorized the setting up of a permanent Interreligious Secretariat on Soviet Jewry.

(2) The Secretariat should seek to organize a network of people in each community around the country. A mailing list should be established of key interreligious leadership.

(3) The Secretariat should relate to major Christian and Jewish structures and officials.

(4) Programming should be undertaken with national mens and womens organizations.

(5) The American Jewish Committee should be encouraged to help convene interreligious bodies in other cities in active cooperation with Christian leaders. Greater use should be made of existing local interreligious committees.

(6) Contact should be established with the Students Struggle for Soviet Jewry, especially for resource people for regional and local meetings.

(7) The Secretariat should expand communication with influential leaders around the country.

(8) The Secretariat should relate to other Christian and Jewish groups in countries overseas.

(9) In particular, effective communication should be established with the Vatican (Secretariat of State, Justice & Peace, etc.), World Council of Churches, World Baptist Alliance, World Presbyterian Alliance.

(10) Interreligious women's programs should be undertaken with Church Women United, WICS (as in Chicago) and Jewish women's groups, National Committee of Negro Women.

(11) A meeting with American blacks on Soviet Jewry should be considered (11 black leaders joined as sponsors of this conference); also Cesar Chavez; also Rep. Badillo.

(12) This issue should be made a priority concern in the various councils of churches - national, regional and local. Efforts should be made to involve them in Solidarity Day Observances.
(13) Denominational leaders should be involved in interreligious efforts.

(14) Catholic Caucus - Catholic members at conference indicated need to communicate on all levels of Catholic Church sense of special urgency to relieve oppression of Soviet Jews. They indicated plans to contact the Apostolic Nuncio; Vatican officials; Cardinal Krol and other leaders of U.S. Catholic hierarchy.

(15) External groups - Conference resolved to communicate with Amnesty International and with UN Commission on Human Rights.

(16) Proposal was made to develop more skillful political strategies based on an incisive understanding of Soviet dynamics. Shared conviction that "what we do can have effect".

C. Information and Communication

On assumptions that "Christians are painfully unaware of the oppression of Soviet Jews or faintly aware," the conference agreed on the need for greater dissemination of information to their constituencies. To meet this need the following proposals were offered:

(1) The preparation of an information-data sheet on the situation of religions in Russia, emphasizing the special character of the problems of Soviet Jewry.

(2) Distributing the petitions of Jewish groups among Christian bodies.

(3) The setting up of a hot-line to provide "instant information."

(4) The writing of articles by Christians in denominational and local publications.

(5) Sending press releases regularly to the denominational publications.

(6) Setting up a complete list of addresses of conference delegates and their constituencies for regular mailings.

(7) Publication of a newsletter on Soviet Jewry; the Sisters
Coalition indicated that they would begin to include information about Soviet Jewry in their own newsletter.

(8) The introduction of the issue of Soviet Jewry in national and local religious radio and TV, and the use of interfaith media.

(9) Preparing and distributing bumper stickers demonstrating interreligious concern.

* In general, the conference delegates agreed on the need to implement as much of this program as possible both on a national scale as well as "doing it back home."
NEW YORK (RNS) -- The observance of National Solidarity Day for Soviet Jews on April 30 has drawn support from a number of Christian leaders.

Bishop Joseph L. Bernardin, general secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference, said the observance "draws United States Christians and Jews into even closer fellowship, in the knowledge that Soviet restriction of religious and civil liberties extends not only to Jews but to Christians as well."

Citing the recent petition of 17,000 Lithuanian Catholics protesting the suppression of their religious rights, he declared, "Truly, when government is bent on denying fundamental religious liberties to any group, none is safe and all must join in protest."

The Solidarity Day observance is being sponsored by the National Council for Soviet Jewry, and is intended to bring together Jews and other Americans for rallies in some 100 cities to show solidarity with Soviet Jews.

The presidents of three Baptist conventions have issued a joint statement supporting the observance and calling on President Nixon to intercede for Soviet Jews during his visit to Moscow in May.

The statement was signed by Dr. Carl E. Bates, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Mrs. Ruth Rohlfs, president of the American Baptist Convention, and Dr. L. Venchael Booth, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

"The seriousness of current events justified this unprecedented act on our part as the presidents of three Baptist denominations whose advocacy of freedom of conscience is the history of their reason for being," the Baptists' statement said.

"To keep silent about wrongs in our beloved land or in distant places is a violation of our understanding of Christian principles of justice and compassion," the Baptist leaders said. "It is in the name and spirit of the Lord of All, who lived his earthly life as a Jew, that we ask your active support of Solidarity Day."
They suggested that a statement adopted by the National Interreligious Consultation on Soviet Jewry held in Chicago in March be read to Baptist congregations.

In a direct appeal to Soviet authorities the consultation said, "Let them live as Jews or let them leave to be Jews."

The Texas Conference of Churches, which includes 15 Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic bodies, has encouraged its members to participate in current efforts to secure a million signatures on petitions urging President Nixon to exert his influence on behalf of Soviet Jews during his visit to the Soviet Union.

More than 300 Jews from throughout the Soviet Union have issued an appeal to the U.S. and European Jewish communities to help deliver the million signatures.

Jewish sources said the appeal was smuggled out of the country and sent to Yosef Takoah, Israeli ambassador to the United Nations.

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, national interreligious affairs director for the American Jewish Committee, hailed the expressions of support by Christian leaders as a "development of major importance."

He said it signified that the plight of the three million Soviet Jews had emerged as a "moral priority" on the agenda of American Christians.

"All men of goodwill must pray and work to see that this message of Solidarity Day and its universal support reaches Washington and Moscow," he said, "in order that the forthcoming conversations between President Nixon and Premier Brezhnev result in positive liberation for Soviet Jewry and all who suffer repression."
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MARCH 19-20, 1972

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