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P R E S S R E L E A S E

THE EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS PRIZE

awarded to the

INTERNATIONAL HELSINKI FEDERATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

by

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Today the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has decided to give the 1989 European Human Rights Prize to the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) and Lech Walesa. We are extremely honoured and proud to be the recipients of this prize - especially together with Lech Walesa, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

This honorary Prize has been given with the following words:
"Considering that Mr. Lech Walesa and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) (Vienna), have made an exceptional contribution to the cause of Human Rights in accordance with the principles of individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law, which are the foundations of any truly democratic society and reflected notably in the European Convention on Human Rights."

The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) and its 15 National Committees have investigated human rights violations in CSCE signatory states. We believe that by undertaking fact finding missions, writing reports, informing governments, Parliaments, organisations, the press and the public and by encouraging human rights activists, we have contributed to the amelioration of the human rights situation. Taking advantage of an improved political atmosphere we have, wherever possible, entered into constructive discussions with governments of states where human rights are grossly abused. In 1988 the IHF sent a high ranking delegation to Moscow, starting a constructive discussion with the USSR Government and institutions on human rights.

The IHF and its National Committees are composed of a relatively small number of prominent citizens and individuals with specific professional expertise, who use their experience and knowledge to influence both public opinion and government policies on a domestic and international level. Their members represent the political, religious and academic society in a balanced way.

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The national committees have a broad mandate to investigate violations of the Helsinki accords by the signatory states. They are concerned about individual victims and about structural violations, such as, restrictions of free expression and the free flow of information and ideas; freedom of civil, political, economic, cultural and religious associations; freedom of movement; family reunification; and the protection of minorities and migrant workers. The IHF is convinced that international peace and cooperation is inextricably linked to the safeguarding of human rights within each sovereign state.

We are grateful for the Prize granted to us and hope it will give us new opportunities to expand and strengthen our activities in favour of human rights in all the CSCE signatory states.

Chairman of IHF is Karl Johannes von Schwarzenberg.
Secretary-General is Gerald Nagler.

Vienna, 3 March 1989