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LONDON SW1A 2AA

17 November, 1988.

From the Private Secretary

Dear Stephen,

**PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH DR. ANDREI SAKHAROV
AT BLAIR HOUSE, WASHINGTON, ON WEDNESDAY, 16 NOVEMBER, 1988**

The Prime Minister had a talk with Dr. Sakharov at Blair House during her visit to Washington. Dr. Sakharov came to the meeting direct from seeing Secretary Shultz. He seemed physically in much better shape than when the Prime Minister saw him in Moscow in March last year.

The Prime Minister began by saying that she was firmly behind Mr. Gorbachev in what he was trying to do in the Soviet Union, and hoped he would succeed. At the same time she had misgivings about the notion of a human rights conference in Moscow, unless there was very clear evidence that the Soviet Union's obligations under the Helsinki Accords were being implemented.

Dr. Sakharov recalled that when he and the Prime Minister had last met, he had described perestroika as a very important and positive development. Since then, many things had got better, but a number of contradictions had also emerged. For instance, anti-democratic tendencies had surfaced in various laws and draft legislation. He had the impression that Mr. Gorbachev was trying to achieve democratic aims by non-democratic means. This was serious and potentially dangerous. Moreover, much of the progress made lacked a proper legal basis. There had also been errors in the handling of problems with the nationalities. In his view, a human rights conference in Moscow could be a useful occasion if certain conditions were fulfilled. It could give support to progressive tendencies and strengthen the case for reform. But the West should not give its agreement unconditionally. He himself had proposed two conditions: the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, and the freeing of prisoners of conscience. Some additions to these conditions might be needed. But this was a matter for those more expert in politics and diplomacy to decide.

The Prime Minister said that there seemed to her to be a fundamental problem. The various actions taken so far, such as freeing political prisoners and allowing more people to emigrate, were administrative decisions taken for political reasons, and had no proper legal basis. That meant they could be rescinded or reversed at will. There must be a proper legal structure for liberty. If the West agreed to a human rights conference in Moscow on a flimsy basis, many people

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in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe would think we had been hookwinked.

Dr. Sakharov agreed on the need for a legal basis. The Soviet state must admit that many of its past actions had been unjust. But these were very sensitive matters involving the prestige of state institutions. There was some considerable time still before a possible conference in Moscow. This would give the Soviet authorities time to make changes in the law. The West should certainly give high priority to this. But whether they should make it an absolute condition for attendance at a human rights conference was more difficult to judge.

The Prime Minister asked about the extent of opposition in the Soviet Union to the changes proposed by Mr. Gorbachev. Dr. Sakharov said there were indeed people for whom change was undesirable. He would make two points about the situation. The first was the extreme difficulty of changing the Soviet system. To be effective, change had to be radical. Secondly, perestroika had not so far produced any real improvement in living standards in the Soviet Union. This was causing great political stress.

The Prime Minister asked how the West should treat the Soviet Union in the present situation. Her own approach was to say that we should stretch out a hand across the East-West divide, while at the same time maintaining a strong defence. Dr. Sakharov said that he thought the Prime Minister's general approach was right. The West should certainly not conceal or gloss over the faults of the Soviet system. There was great respect for her in the Soviet Union, and very widespread approval for her visit there and what she had said publicly during that visit. The Prime Minister said that she was grateful for Dr. Sakharov's support, and would continue with her present approach.

I am sending copies of this letter to Brian Hawtin (Ministry of Defence) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

*Your sincerely,
C.D. Powell*

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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