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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

28 April 1981

Dear Michael,

We spoke about the request the Prime Minister has received from members of her constituency and Lord Bethell that she should receive Mrs Avital Shcharansky, the wife of the well-known Jewish dissident (who played a major part in the group seeking to monitor Soviet implementation of the Helsinki Final Act) during her present visit to Britain.

Mrs Shcharansky is on a lobbying tour of Western capitals to draw attention to her husband's deteriorating health and the extremely harsh conditions under which he is serving his term in labour camp. Anatoly Shcharansky is now in an internal prison within the labour camp and his wife fears that he may over the next two months be put on trial (presumably for alleged violations of camp regulations), sentenced and then returned to his original prison, where conditions are even more debilitating than in the labour camp. If this were to happen, Mrs Shcharansky believes that her husband would die. She is therefore asking Western Governments to give public support to her husband's case, on a scale similar to that provided at the time of his trial in 1978, when, in her view, Western pressure saved her husband from the death sentence. She put all these points to Mr Blaker at a meeting in the FCO yesterday afternoon.

We think it likely that over the next couple of months there will be a concerted campaign by Jewish pressure groups in Britain and other Western countries on Mr Shcharansky's behalf. Mrs Shcharansky has spoken of public demonstrations in Paris and London in May. An indication of the Prime Minister's interest in her husband's plight would be regarded by Mrs Shcharansky as of help to her in obtaining high level appointments in other European capitals and, more generally, in stimulating public and parliamentary interest in the case.

The Soviet authorities, for their part, are likely to claim that any Western government involvement in a campaign on behalf of Shcharansky is an interference in their internal affairs. We need not take this too seriously in the light of the clear provisions of the Final Act, and there are unlikely to be any significant consequences for our relations with the Soviet Union from the Prime Minister's decision to see Mrs Shcharansky. But we should be careful with Shcharansky's position in mind not to give the Russians any

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pretext for claiming that the Western interest in Shcharansky goes beyond that evidenced in other human rights cases (one of the accusations at Shcharansky's trial was that he had worked for the CIA). It will be helpful in any publicity which may follow a call to emphasise the humanitarian aspect and our hope that the Soviet authorities will respond appropriately to the signs that Shcharansky's condition is deteriorating.

Yours ever,

(F N Richards)
Private Secretary

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