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*From the Private Secretary*

*Dear Lynn,*

**PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE CHIEF RABBI**

The Prime Minister saw the Chief Rabbi this afternoon for a discussion which was mostly concerned with the position of Jews in the Soviet Union.

The Chief Rabbi said that he had come to see the Prime Minister in his capacity as President of the Conference of European Rabbis. Their immediate concern was not so much with the minority of Jews who wished to emigrate from the Soviet Union - although of course they supported the campaign to allow this - but with the position of Jews who remained in the Soviet Union. The aim of the Conference of European Rabbis was to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet authorities to enable Jews to have the minimal requirements for maintaining their Jewish religion, culture and identity. The Soviet constitution provided for this but in practice none of the basic rights of Jews were implemented. Instead there was a state of repression with virtually no facilities for Jews to practice their religion. Moscow alone contained more Jews than the whole of the United Kingdom, yet there was only a single synagogue. If young Jews attempted to attend it, they were immediately expelled from university. Even so and almost incredibly there was a revival of Jewish consciousness.

The Chief Rabbi continued that he had been in correspondence (copies enclosed) with the Soviet Ambassador about the possibility of sending a delegation of European Rabbis to discuss these matters. The reply had been that a meeting could be arranged with the Soviet Chief Rabbi. But that was not the point. They wanted to meet decision-makers, not to make a social call. They had put forward an agenda of twelve points which would enable Jews in the Soviet Union to assert their religious and cultural rights without in any way conflicting with Soviet interests. They had no fixed idea of whom they should meet. Obviously they would very much like to see Mr. Gorbachev. But a meeting with the Minister of Cults or of the Interior would be perfectly acceptable. What they needed was reassurance that some substantive measures would emerge from their discussions, even though they did not expect to achieve all twelve of their points. He wondered whether the Prime Minister could mention both the general problem and the specific proposal for a visit by a delegation of European Rabbis in the course of her visit.

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The Prime Minister said that she was very much aware of the repression of Soviet Jews and had studied the evidence for this submitted not just by the Chief Rabbi but also by the Board of Deputies of British Jews and other organisations. She would certainly raise this issue as well as that of Jewish emigration and of course human rights more generally during her visit. The problem was to find a way to do so effectively. She did not wish to launch into a diatribe on the subject just to see Mr. Gorbachev's eyes glaze over. He would in any case probably counter attack by references to us sheltering Nazi war criminals. We needed to find new ways of presenting the arguments. For instance she might recall that it had been the Red Army which had liberated Auschwitz and saved the remaining Jews there; that the Soviet Union had been almost the first to recognise the State of Israel; that Golda Meir had not only been born in Russia but also been the first Israeli Ambassador to Moscow. These were just a few examples. But they were an indication of the sort of arguments which she thought might have some effect. The Chief Rabbi expressed his appreciation of the Prime Minister's willingness to follow up his points.

The Chief Rabbi's representations will need to be taken into account in the papers which the Department are already preparing on the general issue of human rights for the Prime Minister's discussions with Mr. Gorbachev.

As he left, the Chief Rabbi handed over the attached list of names of people personally known to him who were awaiting the grant of exit visas. He hoped that the Prime Minister could take some action on it while in Moscow. You are no doubt assembling a full list of all the names which the Prime Minister has been asked to raise.

*Yours sincerely,  
Charles Powell*

CHARLES POWELL

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