

# Shcharansky Meets With Reagan

WASHINGTON (WNS) — Natan (Anatoly) Shcharansky said that he told President Reagan that he has the "historic opportunity" to bring about the emigration of all Jews who want to leave the Soviet Union.

"The fate of 400,000 Soviet Jews, to a great extent, is in his (Reagan's) hands," Shcharansky said at a press conference following his more than 30-minute meeting with Reagan at the White House. "I am sure that he is the President who can reach success, who can help make the Soviet Union to open the gates."

Shcharansky explained that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, more than his predecessors, understands the "catastrophic situation" of the Soviet economy and that it needs trade with the United States.

He said it was thus up to the President not to be "deceived by cosmetic improvements" in human rights while Congress must not lift trade barriers until Jews are allowed to emigrate. The latter was a reference of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment.

Shcharansky arrived at the White House accompanied by Secretary of State George Shultz. Others attending the meeting were Vice President George Bush, National Security Advisor John Poindexter and White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan.

Shcharansky said that after his arrival in Israel he telephoned Reagan to thank him for his efforts in gaining his release after nine years in Soviet prisons. He said he was able to express "my deepest gratitude" personally. "I am sure that my release would never have been possible if there were not such a strong, open campaign for me, and if President Reagan personally did not take such a strong, open position on my behalf," Shcharansky told reporters outside the White House.

The White House did not release any details of the meeting in keeping with its quiet diplomacy approach on human rights. Shcharansky, who said he was "very encouraged" by the meeting, said he was not surprised that there should be differences between him and the President.

"We sit in different chairs," he said at the press conference. "He is the President of the United States of America and I am previously a Prisoner of Zion and now, thank God, an ordinary citizen of the State of Israel."

But he stressed to reporters at the White House that "quiet diplomacy, from my point of view, can help only if it is supported by strong public pressure, so that for the Soviet Union there will be no illusion that the question of human rights, the question of Soviet Jews, the question of emigration are very closely connected to their economic and political interests."

Shcharansky said at his press conference that the Reagan Administration "deals much better than his predecessor" with the Soviet Union. He said he was "deeply impressed" by Reagan's "understanding of the problem of Soviet Jews and his commitment to the struggle of the right of our people to leave the Soviet Union and to join my people in Israel" as well as for human rights in general.

He said he told the President about the "strong impression" his speeches made on Soviet Jews in prison camps. Shcharansky was very careful not to reveal directly any comments made by the President. When a reporter pressed him, he quipped that the KGB failed in trying to break him down and so "you have no chance with me."

After leaving the White House Shcharansky went to the District Building, Washington's City Hall, where Mayor Marion Barry presented him the key to the District of Columbia.

Earlier, the same day, Shcharansky expressed his "gratitude" to the United States Congress for

helping him win his freedom from the Soviet Union. In return, Congressional leaders pledged to continue the struggle until all Soviet Jews who want to emigrate are allowed to leave the USSR.

"I am released, but 500,000 Soviet Jews are still kept as prisoners of the Soviet Union," Shcharansky said as he was welcomed to Washington in a ceremony in the Rotunda of the Capitol.

"The success in winning the recent release of Anatoly Shcharansky is proof that we need to do much more, not proof that we have done enough," House Speaker Thomas O'Neill, Jr. (D. Mass.) declared. O'Neill said that in a private meeting with Shcharansky, before the ceremony, the leaders of the House and Senate "pledged to continue our efforts to win the freedom of 400,000 Soviet Jews who desire to leave the Soviet Union."

As Shcharansky entered the Rotunda under the Capitol dome he was given a standing ovation by the hundreds of Senators, Representatives, officials of national and local Jewish organizations, and others who attended the ceremony.

During his stay in Washington, he received the Congressional Gold Medal for his wife Avital, and for himself. Both the Senate and House approved resolutions awarding the medals, introduced by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D. N.J.) and Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R. N.Y.).

Avital Shcharansky, who is two months pregnant, remained in Israel for her husband's first visit to the United States. But Rep. Sidney Yates (D. Ill.) noted at the ceremony that she was known to every member of Congress for her constant appeals on behalf of her husband and other Soviet Jews. "That her husband is here today in freedom is as much her victory as it is his," Yates said. He also noted that Shcharansky is the first private citizen to be honored in a ceremony in the Rotunda. To mark the occasion, Shcharansky, who has been appearing in shirt sleeves, wore a suit and tie.

The need to continue the struggle for Soviet Jewry was stressed by all the speakers at the ceremony. Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R. Kan.) stressed that Congress was marking the day both out "of gratitude to Natan Shcharansky's rescue and determination that we will not rest until the key is turned that will unlock countless cells in that unhappy land where dissent is held to be a criminal offense, and true faith is feared as the enemy of political orthodoxy."

Shcharansky noted that he first met members of Congress in 1975, and that their statements as printed in the Congressional Digest were used against him at his trial. Jokingly calling the Congressmen his "accomplices," he said, "I was grateful to know after my release that my accomplices did not abandon me and that our 'criminal' activities continued and continue up to this day."

Shcharansky stressed the need to keep and strengthen the Jackson-Vanik Amendment which provides that the Soviet Union will get U.S. Most Favored Nation trade benefits only if there is large scale emigration.

Recently, in Washington, Shcharansky stressed that it was vital for Western correspondents in the Soviet Union to maintain their contacts with Jewish activists and dissidents. "The free flow of information is a necessary condition of their survival," he said in a speech to the National Press Club.

Shcharansky said many in the United States mistakenly believe he was sentenced to prison in the Soviet Union nine years ago on the "false" charge of providing "secret" information to the Central Intelligence Agency.

Instead, he explained, he was charged with "high treason" because of his "close contact"

with the Western press, especially American correspondents, and for providing them accurate information on human rights conditions in the USSR and the plight of Soviet Jewry.

Shcharansky said Soviet Jewish activists and dissidents and the Western correspondents are "natural allies." He noted that the correspondents are confined "practically in a ghetto" and the only Soviet citizens who will meet with them are the dissidents and Jewish activists.

To express his appreciation for the efforts of American correspondents, Shcharansky presented the National Press Club with a painting of the Western Wall by a Jerusalem artist, Yossi Stern.

Asked about being a "secular Jew," Shcharansky at first didn't understand the term. "The Jewish religion is an important part of my life and it became a very important part of my life while I was in prison." He said reading the Book of Psalms in prison gave him a "strong spiritual communication with my wife, my people and the land of Israel" and helped him face his difficulties.

He added that his wife, Avital, "is an observant Jew and I am far from being an observant Jew" but these were just different ways of expressing the same spiritual feelings.

He noted that the Israeli press made much of the supposed religious differences with his wife, "but once I stopped reading this press all the problems disappeared."

In New York, addressing an overflow meeting of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, attended by more than 200 leaders of Jewish organizations and activists on behalf of Soviet Jews, Shcharansky called on American Jewry to continue its public, open campaign on behalf of Soviet Jewry. "It is important that the Soviets will have no illusions that we will ever sacrifice the interests of our brothers in Russia."

In contrast with some prominent American Jewish leaders, who advocate "quiet diplomacy" to assist Soviet Jewry, Shcharansky said that "for us Jews there is no choice" but to undertake an open campaign and maintain "open pressure" on behalf of Soviet Jews.

He said that while President Reagan can use "quiet diplomacy," American Jews should not take this approach. In fact, Shcharansky said, when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev arrives in Washington for talks, at least 400,000 Americans should come to Washington to remind the Kremlin that 400,000 Soviet Jews who have applied to leave the Soviet Union have been denied exit visas.

He praised the efforts of American Jews on behalf of Soviet Jews. "The solidarity of American Jewry with Soviet Jewry is the brightest example that we Jews all over the world are one people, united over the State of Israel. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews could not have left Russia without the support of American Jews. Without your solidarity and support we could never have survived," Shcharansky told the Jewish leaders.

Asked about the theory that the Soviets closed their gates to Jewish emigration because many Jews who leave the Soviet Union go to America instead of Israel, Shcharansky said: "It is naive to think that they stopped Jewish emigration because Jews go to America." He added, "I, of course, want all Jews to go to Israel, including American Jews ..."

Later, Shcharansky visited Yeshiva University and accepted an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree for Avital, who is pregnant and unable to travel with him. In 1984, Avital accepted the same honorary degree in Yeshiva University on behalf of her husband, who was then in a Soviet prison.

The night before, after addressing more than 300,000 people at the 15th annual Solidarity Sunday for Soviet Jewry in Manhattan, Shcharansky was a guest of honor at a reception at Gracie Mansion given by New York Mayor Edward Koch.