

Shcharansky Warns That The Plight Of Soviet Jews Is Worsening

By Yitzhak Rabi

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) — Natan Shcharansky warned here that the plight of Soviet Jews is worsening, and called for an open, vigorous campaign in the West to pressure the Soviet authorities to accord the Jews and other dissidents their due human rights.

Speaking at a press conference sponsored by the Israel UN Mission, the former Soviet refusenik, who now lives in Israel, charged that the situation of Soviet Jews worsened in recent years, during the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev.

"Many people with goodwill in the West believe that Gorbachev is more liberal, understanding and tolerant than previous Soviet leaders," Shcharansky said. "But the truth is that Gorbachev's record on human rights is the worst. He just got a good public relations campaign. Good propaganda."

Shcharansky said that more Jews are being arrested now for teaching Hebrew than before and that the level of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union is now lower than it has been in many years.

"About 400,000 Soviet Jews are waiting to leave, but only 1,000 were permitted to leave this year," Shcharansky noted. Moreover, he said, the waiting period for an exit visa is longer than it has been in many years. "Some people have been waiting for an exit visa for almost 17 years," he claimed.

West Should Apply 'Strong Pressure'

Shcharansky arrived in New York from

A Human Rights March For Soviet Jewry:

Wiesel Says He Will Try To Bring A Half Million People To Washington If Gorbachev Comes To The Capital

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel said here that if and when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev comes to Washington for a summit meeting, he will try to bring a half

million people to Washington to demonstrate on behalf of Soviet Jews.

Washington where he met with President Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz and other officials and lawmakers.

He said that he raised the situation of Soviet Jews with Reagan and Shultz and that the two said that the issue of human rights of Soviet Jews will be "top priority" in any further negotiations between the United States and the USSR.

Shcharansky said he believes the West should apply "strong pressure" on the Soviet Union, including trade restrictions and scientific exchange limitations, in order to improve the Soviet policy toward Jews and on the issue of human rights. He stressed that his views are his own and that he does not represent the Israeli government.

Shcharansky was critical of the media in the West, claiming that it is too easy on the Soviets and their abuse of human rights. Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, echoed Shcharansky in his assessment of the "worsening situation" of Soviet Jews. The Israeli envoy charged that the Soviet authorities are engaged in the "lobotomization of Jewish culture." He said that Jews are harassed and persecuted for trying to maintain their culture and religion.

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"What I want to do is that the civil rights march of the 1960's should be succeeded by the human rights march for Soviet Jewry in the eighties in Washington," Wiesel told a dinner in his honor.

He arrived at Ben Gurion Airport on his first visit to Israel after receiving the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo December 10. Wiesel told reporters he had promised himself that he would come to Israel immediately after accepting the award because "This is where I feel most at home."

But the 58-year-old author and Auschwitz survivor seemed taken aback by the sharp criticism leveled against him in some quarters. Many Israelis deride Wiesel for not settling in the Jewish State. He is an American citizen.

Nationalist elements have attacked him for asserting in his acceptance speech in Oslo that the Palestinian people also had rights which should be respected.

Cites 'Indescribable' Reception

Wiesel said he believes he was given the Nobel Peace Prize for his activities on behalf of the universal struggle for human and civil rights, for all people, not only Jews in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. He called his reception in Oslo "indescribable" both personally and as a Jew.

"I found great understanding for the Jewish people, and particularly for the plight of Soviet Jewry. I hope we shall succeed in bringing more Jews out" of the USSR, he told reporters at Ben Gurion Airport.

Wiesel lunched with Premier Yitzhak Shamir and appeared in a video film being shot here about the Western Wall for Boston University. He also attended ground-breaking ceremonies of the Holocaust Memorial Synagogue and Torah Center in the Kiryat Ungvar quarter of Jerusalem. It will be named in honor of his father, Shlomo Halevi Wiesel, who perished with all other members of his family in the Holocaust.

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