

Wiesel 'Encouraged' By Reports From USSR About Emigration But Concerned About Soviet Insensitivity To Individual Cases Of Refuseniks

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel said that he is "encouraged" by recent reports that the Soviet government appears to be easing their restrictions against Jews, but remains "profoundly concerned" about their "insensitivity" to individual cases of refuseniks.

"The issue is not whether (the Soviet Union) is more sensitive to Jewish issues or fears; the primary concern is that Jews should be allowed to leave," Wiesel told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

He noted that although reports have stated that as many as 11,000 Jews will be allowed to emigrate, this is still much less than the some 51,000 who were allowed to leave in 1979.

Wiesel made his comments during a visit to Alexander Slepak, the son of Soviet refusenik Vladimir and Maria Slepak who has been fasting at the U.S. Capitol to dramatize the plight of his parents. Wiesel was on his way to receive the Profiles in Courage Award from the local John F. Kennedy Lodge of B'nai B'rith at the Adas Israel Congregation here.

"Slepak is a test case. If we want to believe (Soviet leader Mikhail) Gorbachev's sincerity, and we want to believe it, he must show his good will to Slepak, one of the leaders of the movement," Wiesel said.

Wiesel refused to comment on reports that Soviet Jews will go to Israel from Rumania, instead of going to Vienna where they would have the option of going to the United States. "I want to study the issue," he said.

Slepak, a resident of Israel who is a medical school student in Philadelphia, said he believes Soviet Jews should be allowed to choose between the U.S. and Israel. Appearing alert as he remained on his vigil, Slepak said he speaks regularly to his father who is also fasting. He said the "Soviet government didn't make any steps towards hinting at his possible release."

Vladimir Slepak, one of the founders of the Helsinki Watch Group, first applied for emigration with his wife in 1971, but was refused on the grounds that he had access to state

secrets. An electronic engineer, he is former chief of the Moscow Television Research Institute.

The Slepaks were exiled to Siberia for five years in 1978 after they hung a sign on their balcony demanding that they be allowed to emigrate. Alexander Slepak was permitted to go to Israel ten years ago. Slepak said most of the recent Soviet concessions towards Jews have been in "cultural areas" such as releasing Hebrew teachers from prison and not in emigration.

Heschel Recalled As A 'Prophet' By Widow Of Slain Civil Rights Leader

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the late Jewish philosopher and civil rights activist, was recalled as a "prophet" by Coretta Scott King here.

King, president of the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission, spoke at a meeting of the commission of the "common ground of faith" between her late husband and Heschel, who was a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

He said it was good from time-to-time to be reminded that "people like Martin and Rabbi Heschel don't come around very often." She said the two men were friends and co-workers in the civil rights struggle.

Martin Luther King spoke to the Rabbinical Assembly of America, the Conservative rabbinic group, in March 1968, ten days before he was slain by an

assassin in Memphis, Tennessee, and his widow recalled Heschel's introduction of her husband. "Martin Luther King Jr. is a voice, a vision and a way," Heschel said. "I call upon every Jew to hearken to his voice, to share his wisdom, to follow his way. The whole future of America will depend on the impact and influence of Dr. King."

The commission heard reports on the observance of the King holiday last January, including the activities of the American Jewish community, Israel and at the Israel Embassy here where Coretta Scott King was the guest of honor.

"Shoah," Landmark Documentary About The Holocaust, To Be Presented On Public Television

WNET/New York will premier "SHOAH," the 1985 landmark documentary about the Holocaust, on national public television during the last week in April, in observations of National Holocaust Week.

"SHOAH" will air in parts over a number of consecutive evenings. Airdates and times for the 9-1/2-hour film, which has been heralded by critics as a "masterpiece" and "one of the greatest documentaries in the history of cinema," are Monday, April 27 through Monday, April 30 beginning each evening at 8 p.m. on Channel 10.


The broadcast of "SHOAH" will include a series of newly-filmed interviews with Claude Lanzmann, the film's director, conducted by Time magazine writer and "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour" essayist Roger Rosenblatt. The interviews will offer insight into the planning, execution and meaning of "SHOAH," which the French press called "a monument against forgetting."

"SHOAH," which means "annihilation" in Hebrew, is unlike any other documentary about the Holocaust. Without a single frame of archival footage, the film evokes the horror of the concentration camps, in particular Treblinka, Auschwitz, and Chelmno -- and the terror of both those who died and survived -- by weaving a fascinating fabric of interview of participants and witnesses, images of the sites as they appear today, and discussions with Holocaust scholar Raul Hilberg.

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