

APPEAL OF CONSCIENCE

REMARKS BY SOVIET AUTHOR
CHINGIZ AITMATOV

It is certainly a great honor for me to be receiving the literary prize from the Appeal for Conscience Foundation today. In the name of this foundation, I see a banner for our difficult times, weighed down as they are by previously unheard of dangers on the path to survival. It is a name that emerges more and more clearly and inevitably now on the threshold of the new millennium.

A logical question arises from this -- was not humanity in the past also directed by and obedient to the call of conscience? Are we really the first? No, we are neither the first nor the last. Life on the verge of an atomic catastrophe forces us to say anew and with finality that conscience is our last chance. It is here that we can observe a striking and tragic paradox. Instead of going about our lives in conjunction with the divine ten commandments and with other moral principles, related to them in spirit and goals of the other great religions, humanity has more and more relied on and trusted in the abilities, and strength of sober reason to solve all social, spiritual and political problems.

Ladies and gentlemen, is it not because humanity has passed through so much suffering, torment and wars, that conscience has been left by the wayside as unfounded idealism in the forward movement of history. And conscience has been turned into the servant of reason and has become a process of political manipulation. Conscience cannot and should not be a matter of corporation, class, party, nationality, race or social standing. Humanity, ladies and

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gentlemen, is one and indivisible because it has from the beginning been given a single and indivisible conscience, like an eternal unquenchable thirst for the affirmation of justice and truth. And only in this seeking and striving can humanity achieve the ideals of peace, perfection and beauty. All other possible paths, unilluminated by the eternal light of conscience, are insufficient, mistaken and tragic.

I experience a deep feeling of satisfaction that my friend Rabbi Schneier has devoted his life to the service of a conscience that is greater than national, political and social preconceptions and prejudices. Now that we find ourselves on the road to renewal for the spirit of humanity, the ideas of perestroika and glasnost have converged in no small degree in my country. I am glad to be receiving this great prize together with the First Lady of America, Mrs. Bush and with one of the most prominent figures in American industry, Mr. Smith.