

PRESIDENT, APPEAL OF CONSCIENCE FOUNDATION

AT THE FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL DINNER, OCTOBER 9, 1986, HOTEL PIERRE

Tonight our President is flying to Iceland to meet with the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, in what might be called "Summit One and a Half." All men and women who yearn for peace pray for the success of that meeting, and for a peaceful resolution of the differences that separate the two superpowers.

We in the Appeal of Conscience Foundation are particularly sensitive to the role of religion in international relations. Missions abroad that I have undertaken in behalf of the Appeal of Conscience in recent months have persuaded me that there is increasing recognition that religion can be a binding force of national unity, that religion has a proper and useful role to play in the expression of national policy, and that -- in international affairs as well -- the voice of religion can and should be heard to bring the human family closer to peace.

I am therefore pleased to make an important announcement. For the first time in the history of the Soviet Union, the Chairman of the Council of Religious Affairs of the USSR -- a post equivalent to that of Minister of Religion -- will be visiting the United States later this month. His name is Constantine Karchev. I have met Mr. Karchev in Moscow, and I was delighted that he accepted my invitation to visit the United States as the guest of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

Mr. Karchev will visit a number of American cities, including Washington, Atlanta and New York, where he will meet with Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Jewish and Protestant lay and religious leaders. During his visit to our shores he will observe at first hand the diversity of American religious life. I have helped to arrange his itinerary, and to make sure that he meets with Americans of many faiths and many walks of life.

Since the Geneva summit, we have seen a resumption of cultural exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union such as the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art of works from Leningrad's Heritage Museum. We in the Appeal of Conscience Foundation believe strongly that these cultural exchanges should be broadened to include a religious dimension. We are hopeful that Mr. Karchev's visit to our country will lead to an expansion of contacts between religious communities in the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

We are very proud of our relationship with the Academy of Social Sciences of the People's Republic of China. It began several years ago with the first visit of an Appeal of Conscience delegation in 1981. We returned in 1983, and reached agreement under which two Chinese scholars spent a year at American universities and theological seminaries under our auspices to study American religious life and thought.

In return the Appeal of Conscience was invited to send to China lecturers on American religious trends and their impact on U.S. foreign and domestic policy. Dr. David Randolph, senior minister of Christ Church United Methodist in Manhattan, and Father Vincent O'Keefe, S.J., former president of Fordham University, and I went to China on such a mission this past summer, addressing and conferring with scholars, government officials and religious leaders. So positive were these experiences that further religious exchange agreements were reached.

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has accepted our invitation to Professor Gao Wangzhi, China's leading authority on Christianity and Judaism, to study in the United States beginning early next year. In addition, Chinese authorities have agreed to participate in a conference of Chinese and American scholars, dealing with religion and society, to be convened by the Appeal of Conscience Foundation early next year in New York. We will also be exchanging books and periodicals with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. And I am pleased to report that an agreement was reached with the Institute of History of the Academy of Social Sciences in Shanghai to undertake a research study into the history of the 25,000 European Jews who found refuge in Shanghai from Nazi persecution during World War II.

These achievements in understanding have strengthened our view that religious contacts across international lines have a positive role to play in promoting mutual understanding and friendship among peoples.

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