

@CHAPTER = POLAND

In 1989, Poland experienced dramatic political and social changes that have had a strong impact on the human rights situation in that country. These changes, which led to the appointment of the first non-Communist prime minister in post-Yalta Eastern Europe, were first initiated during a series of negotiations between the government and the opposition, held in Warsaw from February 6 to April 5. Most human rights violations in 1989 occurred prior to the April 5 agreement, which re-legalized Solidarity and outlined the plans for profound reforms, including June elections and changes in the political and legal structure.

The Bush administration welcomed the signing of the agreement, calling it "a great day for the Polish people and for freedom." Statements that followed the elections as well as speeches delivered during President Bush's July trip to Poland were similar in tone. But all such statements showed no sign of continued vigilance on human rights issues. The furthest that the administration went in this regard was to send a senior member of the president's delegation to meet with members of the Polish human rights community to be briefed about the state of human rights in Poland.

The administration's only pronouncement on human rights in Poland came on January 31, when the State Department spokesman expressed concern over two murders that month of opposition-linked priests. The administration stated its expectation that "Polish authorities will conduct a thorough and rapid investigation" of these killings, but there was no follow-up statement about the two assassinations or any official reaction to a July murder of another opposition priest.

While the human rights situation in Poland has improved significantly during the past eight months, we urge the administration to remain vigilant, particularly since the police remain in the hands of those responsible for widespread abuses in the past. The administration should not drop the human rights issues from its Polish agenda on the assumption that democratic changes will automatically guarantee the observance of human rights. The political structure in Poland is new and fragile, and many changes that will have a significant and lasting effect on human rights are yet to come, including amendments to the penal code, reform of the judiciary and revisions of the laws regulating prosecutors. The administration should monitor these issues closely and urge Polish officials to adopt legislative reforms to ensure that the freedoms now being exercised as a matter of governmental grace are secured as a matter of right.