

## FOREWORD

As I write this foreword to the 1989 Annual Report I have just returned from Bratislava and Prague. The International Helsinki Federation was having its first open human rights meeting in Czechoslovakia. Helsinki Committees from 18 nations attended including East Germany, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and, of course, the Czechoslovaks themselves. The meeting was held in Bratislava to show respect to the Slovaks who had been an important part of the human rights movement and to show the unity between the two parts of this small state. Jan Carnogursky, a Deputy Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia and a human rights activist, is a Slovak and made a point of coming to our dinner to celebrate and to thank Jeri Laber, Executive Director of Helsinki Watch, and myself for the work of the United States Helsinki Watch over the last 10 years. My observation of the meeting was that Jeri, who has traveled extensively in Central Europe, could run for sainthood if such an office existed.

Yet while it was nice to be appreciated as one talked to the participants from the states emerging from totalitarian rule, and realized what their lives had been like -- prison terms at hard labor, no advanced schooling for their children, the most menial jobs. I realized again the luck of a United States citizen in being able to fight for what you believe in from a protected haven. I also realized that the fight for an open society is not over in most of Central Europe; with a sure economic crisis on the horizon many nationalist and right-wing factions are poised to share in the fight for power. Similarly, in Latin America, where a "transition to democracy" has been underway for a decade, an economic disaster is complicating the process of establishing the rule of law required to protect human rights.

Most thinking people recognize that the major problems the world now faces are international problems and cannot be solved nationally: ecological problems, nuclear armament, poverty, AIDS, the drug crisis, to name a few. These problems require the best minds all over the world and the best minds can only function freely and communicate with their counterparts freely where human rights standards are observed.

That is why this is such an important moment for human rights in the United States. We Americans are proud of our institutions -- our hospitals, our universities, our museums, our cultural groups -- and we are generous in supporting them. But somehow we do not realize that our greatest institution is our ideas, the human rights ideas embedded in our constitution, and that this is the moment when we must persuade others to devise ways to protect ideas in their own societies. This will not happen by itself. If human rights principles are to be institutionalized on a worldwide basis, it will take struggle, money and skilled and devoted individuals.

Human Rights Watch launched Africa Watch in 1988, and the Middle East Watch in 1989, so we are now promoting human rights on a global scale. This means we are trying to monitor countries that are hard to get into, countries like North Korea, Burma, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, and Syria. We have had to become ever more resourceful in gathering data on these countries where the

population has been victimized by massive abuses. Also in 1989 we greatly expanded our work in Asia, particularly in the People's Republic after the disastrous events at Tiananmen Square.

We are trying to keep a record of the people who have disappeared into the Chinese gulag. We are trying to bring pressure on the Chinese government to release them but as our recent publication, "Punishment Season," shows, little headway is being made. That is why remarks by influential Americans supporting the necessity of clearing Tiananmen Square, and toasts to China's leaders by close advisors to the President have been so harmful to human rights goals. Their realpolitik seems so outmoded at the very moment when it is apparent that pressure on countries that are violent abusers of human rights seems to work. They also contrast to our former reactions to the Soviet gulag and even to our sanctions against South Africa.

The annual budget of Human Rights Watch has now reached \$4,000,000 annually. My colleagues and I are grateful to our generous supporters for their assistance. We seek additional funds because we know there is much more that needs to be done to protect human rights and because we believe that the record of our work that is reflected in this report places us in a good position to make a continuing contribution to the alleviation of repression, and of the suffering that it causes worldwide.

Robert L. Bernstein  
Chairman