

RECORD STATEMENT
CONGRESSMAN LES AuCOIN
MARCH 15, 1979
SPECIAL ORDER - ANATOLY SHCHARANSKY

MR. SPEAKER. I join with my colleagues today in marking the second anniversary of the arrest of Anatoly Shcharansky, a Soviet dissident who is now unjustly imprisoned in a Soviet labor camp.

Two years ago, Mr. Shcharansky was arrested and incarcerated in Moscow's Lefortovo Prison. His crime: Wanting to emigrate to Israel to join his wife.

His arrest came after several years of harrassment by the police and when his efforts on behalf of other Soviet Jews desiring to emigrate began to attract world attention. But no charges were made against him at the time.

Indeed, he spent over a year in solitary confinement before being formally charged with any crime, and even then the allegations of treason by the Soviet State were without foundation.

This became evident at Mr. Shcharansky's trial last summer: A pro forma exercise with no real challenge to the State's case. It was an effort to justify the government's treatment of him and show the world that the U.S.S.R. would not succumb to international pressure on behalf of its citizens who seek a better life elsewhere. The verdict was as much of an outrage as the process: thirteen years at hard labor.

But the trial of Anatoly Shcharansky did more than mock the very name of justice: It demonstrated to the world that, as one American diplomat observed, "The ideals to which the U.S.S.R. has committed itself in the Helsinki Accords are still far from realization."

Now, before the first year of that sentence is done, we hear that he is in ill-health and that he has been denied a visit by his mother and brother. The Soviet campaign of harrassment continues.

So we mark this day, the second anniversary of Mr. Shcharansky's arrest, to protest the circumstances that led to his current imprisonment; to demonstrate our apprehension for Mr. Shcharansky's fate; and to voice the strongest concern of the American people that such a code of justice could exist in a nation that is a signatory to the Helsinki Accords on human rights.

But our commemoration today on behalf of Anatoly Shcharansky should do more than recall abuses of human rights perpetrated in the name of justice. It should be the occasion for a renewal of our commitment to human rights and the just treatment and welfare of every individual.

This should be the occasion when we renew our pledge to champion the cause of individual freedom and individual conscience--and take the lead in its pursuit.

Anatoly Shcharansky has shown his commitment to this ideal and set an example for us all. The renewal of our own commitment to human rights will assure that his sacrifices have been heeded by us and by the international community.

To lead the world in the pursuit of human rights is not easy. The path to universal recognition of human dignity and the worth of the individual is a road of difficult turns and dangerous passes. At each crossroads, there are hard choices: Which way is best?

I am confident, however, that we can follow this road and that we can take the lead. I am confident that we choose the right turns and reach our destination. Anatoly Shcharansky has shown us the courage we need to follow this path.

Our first steps begin today in calling attention to his plight. We salute his family and those who speak out for him and we renew our commitment to the cause of human rights.