

THE CALIFORNIA COMMITTEE OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

The California Committee of Human Rights Watch was formed in April 1987. During its first two years, the Committee held periodic meetings to consider human rights conditions in other countries. As members began to participate in and report on Watch Committee missions to investigate human rights conditions abroad, the group's desire to become active at a professional level increased. In April 1989, in cooperation with the national office, the Committee opened an office in Los Angeles and hired Ellen Lutz, an experienced human rights attorney, as Director.

The purposes of the California Committee are: to support the work of all of the Watch Committees by carrying out tasks that are best undertaken from California; to assume responsibility for Americas Watch's research on Mexico¹; and to develop an education and outreach program that will enhance awareness of and support for international human rights in the region.

On behalf of Americas Watch, the California Committee has sent delegates on missions to Chile, Guatemala and Mexico. The mission to Chile occurred in September 1988, in advance of the October 5 plebiscite when Chileans resoundingly voted to end the presidency of General Augusto Pinochet. California Committee participants, Abraham Lowenthal and Clara A. "Zazi" Pope, contributed Op Ed articles on Chile to several newspapers.

In April 1989, Raquel Ackerman of the California Committee participated in an Americas Watch delegation to Guatemala to investigate recent killings and death threats directed at Guatemalan human rights monitors. Following her trip, the California Committee participated in Americas Watch efforts to cut-off U.S. military aid to Guatemala until human rights conditions improve. The Committee also enlisted theater and film artists in protesting the killing of a Guatemalan actor and union activist and seeking protection for his colleagues who have received death threats.

Members of the California Committee have been active in litigation on behalf of family members of individuals who were tortured, "disappeared," or murdered by security forces during Argentina's "dirty war." On behalf of Americas Watch and the ACLU of Southern California, they represented the plaintiffs in Rapaport v. Suarez Mason, one of three civil lawsuits against former Argentine General Suarez Mason, commander of the Armed Forces in the Buenos Aires region from 1977-79. Suarez Mason, who lived clandestinely in the U.S. from 1984-88 was extradited to Argentina where he awaits trial for human rights atrocities. Plaintiffs in the Rapaport action were awarded a default judgment of \$60 million. Counsel in the Rapaport action and the two related cases were nominated by the Trial Lawyers for Public Justice for 1989 Trial Lawyer of the Year.

The California Committee's primary activities on behalf of Asia Watch focused on China. In June, San Francisco-based Committee members helped organize a benefit concert at Davies Symphony Hall

¹ A description of this work may be found in the Americas Watch section of this report.

at which internationally recognized musicians performed. The Committee also formed a China sub-group that worked closely with Asia Watch's China researcher, Robin Munro, to develop a set of principles to guide U.S. businesses active in China. San Francisco-based Committee member Dolores Donovan, an expert on the Chinese penal system, testified at hearings held by U.S. Representatives Tom Lantos and Nancy Pelosi on the human rights situation in China and on measures to protect the rights of Chinese students in the United States.

The California Committee has also worked with Helsinki Watch. In September and October, California Committee member Frank Wheat visited Turkey where he met with human rights monitors and leading members of the Bar. Members of the California Committee subsequently took part in a campaign on behalf of Fatma Yazici, the Turkish magazine editor who was sentenced to six years and three months imprisonment for publishing an article that summarized Helsinki Watch's report Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Kurds of Turkey.

In April, several members participated in a meeting of U.S.-based public interest lawyers and Soviet lawyers interested in human rights. The Soviet lawyers expressed interest in receiving reference and training materials used by U.S., state and local prosecutors and public defenders regarding proper arrest, search and seizure, detention, and other pre-trial procedures to aid in their efforts to press for strengthened legislation to protect the rights of the accused. The Committee is compiling materials for use by lawyers throughout the world interested in learning more about U.S. criminal justice procedures.

Since its inception the California Committee has presented frequent public programs on various human rights issues. In September the California Committee hosted a special gallery premiere of Forced Out, a photo exhibition at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery featuring photographs from Carole Kismaric's acclaimed photojournalistic account of the plight of refugees worldwide. Kismaric's work was sponsored by Human Rights Watch. A meeting with public interest immigration lawyers was held in December to discuss ways that Human Rights Watch can better serve the needs of refugees seeking asylum in the United States.

The forty-member California Committee meets bi-monthly. Meetings combine presentations about human rights conditions in countries throughout the world with oversight of the work of the California office. The Co-Chairmen of the California Committee are Stanley Sheinbaum and Jane Olson.

WASHINGTON OFFICE ACTIVITIES IN 1989

As Human Rights Watch grew with the creation of Africa Watch in 1988 and Middle East Watch in 1989, our Washington office activities expanded as well. Human Rights Watch representatives testified before Congress twenty times in 1989 on human rights violations and U.S. human rights policy. Helsinki Watch testified on Turkey, on the situation of ethnic Turks in Bulgaria, and on human rights developments in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Americas Watch testified on U.S. foreign assistance to Latin America, on human rights in El Salvador, Haiti and Cuba, and on U.S. asylum policy towards Nicaraguans and Salvadorans. Africa Watch provided

Congressional testimony on U.S. foreign aid to five African countries, on human rights in Somalia, Angola and Sudan, and on U.S. policy towards Somalia in the multilateral development institutions. Asia Watch provided testimony on China on three separate occasions, on U.S. foreign aid to selected Asian countries and on human rights in Taiwan and Burma.

Monitoring U.S. policy towards China and providing information on human rights to the Congress were particular priorities of Asia Watch in Washington during 1989. Asia Watch's extensive prisoner lists were eagerly received by Members of Congress and their staffs. Asia Watch actively supported a strong U.S. sanctions policy against China as well as the rights of Chinese students in the United States not to be forced to return home.

The sharp deterioration of human rights conditions in El Salvador was a major focus of Americas Watch's work in 1989. The Washington office became an information clearinghouse for Congress on killings, jailings and developments in the Jesuit case, and the staff closely monitored U.S. policy on El Salvador. The office organized dozens of Congressional letters and cables to the Bush Administration and the Cristiani government on Salvadoran human rights cases.

The Washington Office of Africa Watch established extensive links with human rights leaders in Congress, who welcomed the creation of the group. Africa Watch established particularly close contacts with the Congressional Black Caucus, which has a strong interest in Africa. Africa Watch provided Congress with information on more than a dozen countries, concentrating on Sudan, Kenya and Somalia. Congressional activism on Somalia, aided by Africa Watch, effected a major change in U.S. policy towards the Siad Barre regime. Africa Watch's Washington staff facilitated the visit of South African anti-apartheid leader Albertina Sisulu to Washington where she met with President Bush.

The Washington office began work for the first time on U.S. policy towards countries in the Middle East. Middle East Watch was especially concerned about extensive U.S. support for Iraq through the Export-Import Bank and the commodity credit program, and supported Congressional efforts to limit such benefits to the Saddam Hussein regime. The office also took up cases of human rights monitors and journalists in the Middle East, including several cases involving Palestinians jailed by the Israeli government.

The events in Eastern Europe changed Helsinki Watch's Washington work, which had previously been focused on individual prisoner cases. In 1989, we kept Congress informed on human rights developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and encouraged Congressional attention to violent abuses, including the treatment of Turks in Bulgaria and the problem of torture in Turkey.

The Washington office of Human Rights Watch continued its work on labor rights, and pressed the U.S. Trade Representative to implement the laws linking U.S. trade benefits and protection for internationally recognized worker rights, particularly freedom of association. Americas Watch filed formal petitions with the U.S. Trade Representative on labor rights violations in El Salvador and the Dominican Republic.

"The Congressional Friends of Human Rights Monitors" (a bipartisan Congressional group formed by Human Rights Watch in 1985 which includes 32 Senators and 143 Members of the House of Representatives) took up the cause of dozens of persecuted human rights monitors in 1989, including cases in Brazil, Bulgaria, Cuba, Guatemala, China, South Africa, Suriname, Guyana, Kenya, Peru, Honduras, Romania, Somalia, El Salvador, Korea, Iran, Philippines, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, India, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Israel.

A similar organization formed by Human Rights Watch in 1988 to support freedom of the press sent letters and cables on behalf of persecuted journalists and writers in Brazil, Chad, Czechoslovakia, South Korea, Malawi, Paraguay, Turkey, Uganda, Grenada, Taiwan, El Salvador, China, Colombia, Israel, Panama, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Romania, USSR, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Nicaragua, Philippines and Afghanistan. The group also worked on the case of writer Salman Rushdie.

The Washington office organized extensive activities for ten human rights monitors, who visited Washington in December in connection with the publication of Human Rights Watch's third annual report on the persecution of human rights monitors worldwide. The monitors had visits with Congress, the executive branch, journalists, and with other human rights organizations.

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