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HUMAN RIGHTS AND SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Letter dated 7 March 1983 from the representative of the
United States of America to the Commission on Human Rights,
addressed to the President of the thirty-ninth session of
the Commission on Human Rights

I have the honour to request that the enclosed statement on the jamming of
international broadcasting be circulated as an official document of the thirty-ninth
session of the Commission on Human Rights, under Item 15 of the Agenda "Human Rights
and Scientific and Technological Developments".

(Signed) Richard Schifter
United States Representative to
the Commission on Human Rights

Annex

JAMMING OF INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

Jamming of international broadcasting, which has greatly increased in recent years, is a serious violation of human rights which should be of concern to all nations. The right to receive "information and ideas through any media" is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ("everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers"). Jamming is therefore a legitimate and appropriate subject meriting the attention of the Commission on Human Rights.

Jamming is, indeed, a vital issue because the control and obstruction of ideas and information in countries which lack independent sources of information is one of the most crucial of all totalitarian methods of repression. Through the restriction of information, such a government is able to exert a degree of control over its citizens, which can lead to an atmosphere that encourages violations of additional human rights, including violations of the rights of the person.

International radio broadcasting is the single most important communications medium for hundreds of millions of people throughout the world, particularly those under Soviet rule. Recognizing this, the Soviet Union and other Soviet Bloc countries have greatly modernized and expanded their international broadcasting efforts during these years.

At the same time, the Soviets and their allies have sought to discourage or prevent reception of international broadcasts in their territories, principally through massive investment in electronic jamming equipment. We estimate that the Soviet Union has invested three times as much on jamming as the United States has invested in broadcasting, and jamming is now at unprecedented intensity.

Jamming is not an issue of exclusive concern to Western nations. Radio frequencies are scarce, and jamming seriously pollutes the international radio spectrum, wasting this precious international resource. At a time of spiralling demand for access to high frequency (shortwave) bands by all nations, jamming penalizes the developing nations and threatens the viability of the international radio regulatory regime.

Also, for the first time, Soviet jamming now extends to broadcasts intended for third countries - specifically, Poland and Afghanistan.

In addition to violating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, jamming is incompatible with other international agreements on human rights and freedom of information, for example, the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (the Helsinki Accords).

Recognizing that there are cases in which the citizens of entire States are prevented from the passive act of listening to the broadcast of information from abroad, and bearing in mind that the principle of the free flow of information carries with it the obligation to allow access to competing ideas, the United States urges the Commission on Human Rights to give serious attention to this grievous violation of "the right to know", and to consider appropriate measures to deal with it at its next session.