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*From the Private Secretary*

3 January 1989

Thank you for your letter of 2 December to the Prime Minister about the proposed Moscow human rights conference and the plight of the Jewish population in the Soviet Union. I have been asked to reply.

As you will know, President Gorbachev's visit had to be postponed because of the tragic earthquake in Armenia. We hope that it will be reinstated soon. I know that the Prime Minister will have human rights very much in her mind when she and President Gorbachev next meet.

We want to see fundamental and lasting change to allow all Soviet citizens to enjoy the full range of human rights and freedoms.

The Government have long said that agreement to the prospect of a Moscow conference on human rights in 1991, as part of a series of such meetings under the CSCE process, would only be possible if there were a major improvement in Soviet human rights performance.

There have been some encouraging signs recently. More prisoners of conscience have been released. More long-term refuseniks have been given permission to leave. There has been further progress towards an end to all jamming. Mr. Gorbachev has now given public assurances at the UN that Soviet legislation and practice will be amended to prevent human rights abuses in future. We and the Americans are pressing for still more progress.

You can, however, be sure that we would not be prepared to attend a conference on human rights in Moscow in 1991 unless the Soviet Government had clearly demonstrated that it was prepared to regard human rights as fundamental rather than a matter for the State's discretion and that this was properly reflected in the Soviet legal code and the way that was enforced. Any such conference would also need to be held in suitably open conditions so that, for example, representatives of Western human rights organisations could attend and freely express their concerns.

CHARLES POWELL

Rabbi Dr. Charles H. Middleburgh.

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