Exploring the International Helsinki Federation and the Czech Helsinki Committee:
A Reconstruction of Networks, Actors, and Best Practices
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#### Introduction

The research at the Open Society Archive's collection of Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) has entailed in-depth historical detail. Specifically, this research project seeks to identify and catalog the actors, members, leaders, and network of the IHF. In general, the research answers a number of questions regarding the genesis of the IHF, the communication techniques between the IHF and National Helsinki groups in Socialist states during the Cold War, the funding sources of the IHF, English-language publishing, and involvement with international organizations such as the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE/OSCE), United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe (CoE), and the European Union (EU). By answering these questions and identifying the actors of, first the Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee (CsHC) then subsequently the Czech Helsinki Committee (CHC), the research will position the CHC among other National Helsinki groups in terms of relevance, influence, and leadership. Furthermore, the research seeks to discover if the best practices, coalitions and networks used during the height of the IHF's relevance can be applied to human rights issues and international civil society organizations today.

The research requires a thorough examination of the creation of the IHF. By identifying the actors involved and the organizations responsible, further research can assess other human rights projects influenced by those same actors and groups. In other words, were the actors responsible for establishing the IHF also integral to its success, and to the success of other human rights ventures and how much did they contribute to idea of human rights in Europe?

Identifying and analyzing the communication and collaboration between the IHF, National Helsinki

groups, and International Organizations (IOs) is another important goal of this research project. The questions answered here are: What directives, if any, were passed down to National Helsinki groups by the IHF? How much communication and collaboration took place between National Helsinki groups? Did clear actors or organizations emerge as coordinators and leaders? How often did the IHF work with other IOs?

Funding is also a major issue examined in this research. As the disillusionment of the IHF was brought about by the mismanagement of funds, identifying funding sources takes on special significance. This paper will identify the major funding sources of the IHF.

This research project will also identify, map, and catalog significant conferences, meetings, and seminars that included international groups. As the IHF continued post-Cold War, it is assumed that the location of these meetings would shift. By mapping these areas throughout the IHF history, this research seeks to uncover any connection to IHF membership.

The IHF also distributed a number of publications. This research seeks to analyze those publications to identify the issues that were most salient for the IHF in general and for the CHC specifically. The project will analyze these publications and track the progress of work on those topics. Particularly, in regards to the CHC, what was the change after the Velvet Divorce and dissolution of the Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee?

Finally, this research seeks to understand the major factors responsible for the dissolution of the IHF. Who were the actors responsible? What was the internal response of the IHF? What was the response of the National Helsinki groups and how many continued operation after the fact? What was the

## response of the CHC?

This research project seeks to identify the actors, groups, and leaders involved with the creation, management, and eventual dissolution of the IHF. Specifically, this research attempts to analyze memos, reports, newsletters, and mission files of the IHF to answer questions regarding the membership network, funding, geographic centers of influence, significant partnerships, actors, and especially the role of the CHC within this broader context. This project also attempts to determine the human rights portfolio of the IHF and CHC, and identify best practices that can be utilized by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) today.

#### Methodology

This project was initially conceived as an in-depth analysis of the IHF collection at the OSA. However, after careful examination of the material, it is clear that the time constraints of the Visegrád Scholarship make such detailed analysis impractical, especially for first stage researchers. Therefore, this project represents a pragmatic approach to addressing the substance of the research questions and the preponderance of material available at the OSA.

The OSA collection on the IHF is quite extensive and spans the lifetime of the organization. Because the research questions focused on the practical administration and activities of the IHF, and to a lesser degree the CHC, reconstructing the organizational structure, identifying the various actors, selecting best practices, and mapping the geographic extent of influence provided a viable solution. Thus, the Administrative files, Files of the Executive Director, Publications, Correspondence and Memoranda, and the Country Files for the Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia) represent the OSA materials used for this examination. These sub-fonds are over 100 containers of content that, through the course the Fellowship, were reduced to approximately 40 relevant containers.

The process for analyzing the containers, after examining the online catalog, was to read through the relevant folders and take photos of the pertinent documents. The documents gathered using this method make up approximately 20 GB of material. This material is stored locally and the most useful documents are being uploaded to the OSA's Parallel Archive. Furthermore, any gaps in the OSA collection were filled by utilizing the stored IHF website at the Internet Archive. Actors, reports, conference locations, funding sources, and member organizations were isolated in a variety of sources and cataloged chronologically.

Though the timeline spans the lifetime of the IHF, beginning in 1982 and ending in 2007, further Time-Series analysis has yet to be explored. Instead, this data is used herein simply to reconstruct the IHF and distinguish notable events and changes. In a later section, this essay will explore further possibilities for research concerning the information gathered at the OSA.

#### **Exploring the IHF**

I appeal for the creation of a unified international committee to defend all Helsinki Watch Group members, to bring together the forces of several groups at work" ~Dr. Andrei Sakharov, "Alarm and Hope", 1978.

The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) was initiated at the International Citizens Helsinki Watch Conference between September 6-10, at Lake Como, Italy in 1982. Ironically, 2007 marked both the organization's 25th anniversary and it's dissolution. Officially, the IHF existed from 9 September 1982 to 27 November 2007, and began as the *International Helsinki Human Rights Committee*, but by the end of that year it was changed to the IHF (HU OSA 318-0-8, Box 1, IHF: General: International Citizens Helsinki Watch Conference, Bellagio, 1982, Report of the International Citizens Helsinki Watch Conference, September 6-10, 1982, Lake Como, Italy, p.17).

The original group of five committees<sup>1</sup>, decidedly announced the formation of the IHF to coincide with the forced closure of the Moscow Helsinki Group by the Soviet KGB (HU OSA 318-0-8, Box 1, IHF:General: International Citizens Helsinki Watch Conference, Bellagio, 1982, Report of the International Citizens Helsinki Watch Conference, September 6-10, 1982, Lake Como, Italy). The groups from Canada, France, the Netherlands, Norway, and the USA were joined by groups from Austria, Belgium, and Sweden at the Bellagio Conference.

Thus the IHF was born. Early meetings and conferences saw the discussion of the relevance of the name Helsinki. IHF members agreed to work toward holding signatories to the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe at Helsinki, Finland, or Helsinki Accords,

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Helsinki Watch Group, La Comite Parisien pour le Respect de l'Acte Finale de Helsinki (Paris Helsinki Committee), Helsinki Committee of the Dutch Branch of the International Commission of Jurists, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, U.S. Helsinki Watch Committees

responsible to Principle VII (Human Rights) of the Declaration. Although, there were internal discussions concerning the direction of the IHF in many of the early conferences, and scholarly inquiries into Signatory States' focus on Principle IV (Territorial Integrity) and how that shaped the future of Human Rights, those remain outside the scope of this report.

Practically speaking, the IHF used a number of methods to communicate between the Secretariat in Vienna and National Committees. This communication was integral to developing the IHF network, providing support to National committees, and informing the "West" about Human Rights issues happening behind the so-called Iron Curtain. In that era, the IHF communicated by writing letters, sending communique to activists in exile, and coordinating meetings and seminars along with CSCE meetings in Socialist states.

However, once Socialism failed in Europe, the IHF shifted to more modern and regular communication methods such as bulletins, memos, fax, email, meetings, conferences, and seminars. The Secretariat, based in Vienna, acted to publicize human rights violations and promote human rights norms, to coordinate between National committees, to promote human rights education, to publish reports, and engage with other International Organizations (IOs).

Arguably, the IHF operated the height of it's influence between 1995 and 2005. The veracity of this assessment is found in the expansion of the Secretariat, the membership network, reports, and funding sources. Although, there is a lack of clearly quantifiable funding levels within the OSA collection, the funding sources are readily available.

Whereas National committees were responsible for their own funding, the IHF received most funding from European sources, and more specifically Austrian sources. There were a number of US, and to a

lesser extent Canadian, funding sources for the IHF during this period. The Although some funding allowances can be traced to their sources, the Ford Foundation for example, it still remains outside of the scope of this report to quantify the amount of funds received.

National Helsinki groups were funded by a variety of sources as well. Most of those sources seemed to be project-based at the EU level or from International Organizations (e.g. United Nations). The National groups appealed to the IHF on a regular basis, but the IHF rarely funded National groups at any significant level. The National groups did not specifically report funding to the IHF funding. They did, however, submit annual reports, copies of applications to IOs, etc.

The IHF published all of their reports in English, and some reports are available in Russian and German as well. The IHF publications run the gamut of Human Rights issues, from special reports concerning violations in Georgia, to direct statements to the OSCE. The most important report, it seems, is the annual report that began as a publication of IHF Activities and Human Rights conditions behind the Iron Curtain, and later included country level reports for OSCE participating states and states with National Helsinki groups.

The actors responsible for creating the IHF soon left the organization. Of course their contributions led to the prominence of the IHF and to establishing a relevant network. However, many of those actors had been replaced by the time the IHF was well established within Europe and very few were still connected with the organization at the time of its dissolution.

The most influential international actors, in terms of both influence and relevance, were the Executive Directors. Aaron Rhodes was arguably the most influential of the three. His tenure saw the expansion

of the IHF to include many post-Soviet republics, to gain more funding, and he was invited to speak and participate in a number of international conferences. On the other hand, the actor most responsible for the dissolution of the IHF was the financial officer, Rainer Tannenberger. His embezzlement of over 1.2 million euro led directly to the bankruptcy and closure of the IHF (Fischer 2007). The IHF internal response to dissolution is difficult to gauge. Attempts to contact former IHF personnel and leadership have yet to develop into any concrete information. From the publications the IHF issued during its dissolution, it is clear that senior leadership stepped down once the financial officer was arrested for embezzlement. It is dangerous to draw deeper conclusions from those decisions without corroboration from internal sources.

There are a number of conferences and significant meetings that occurred at the beginning of the IHF. These, as expected, were coordinated close to CSCE meetings. However, as the IHF developed, it began to focus more on developing the membership network, producing reports on various human rights issues, participating in events with other Human Rights Organizations (HROs) and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), and producing seminars and conferences around specific issues that did not necessarily encompass the work of all National Helsinki groups.

As such, careful examination of all reports throughout the IHF lifetime is again beyond the time constraints of this research project. However, this report does include maps that show the initial development of the IHF, the location of Member Committees, and the geographic scope of the organization at the time of dissolution. Because there were few established coalitions within the IHF, these maps serve to highlight the IHF's influence within Europe and Central Asia.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A and Appendix B

The IHF had only a few requirements of Member and Cooperating Committees. "(a) All members shall advance the interests of the **Federation** and shall avoid any action which might discredit or damage the **Federation** or interfere with the achievement of its aims." "(b) Every member committee shall, before a given date every year set by the Executive Committee, report to the Secretariat on the human rights situation in their country, as well as report on the activities of their organization" (HU OSA 318-0-1, Box 4, IHF: Statutes and Registration Documents, 2003 – 2007, Statutes of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (as amended through 20 November 2005), p.3). "Members and Cooperating Committees shall pay an annual fee to the **Federation**, the amount to be determined by the General Assembly...All Members may be required by the Executive Committee to submit to the Secretariat at least annually a statement of the sources and/or uses of their funds and/or the budgets (HU OSA 318-0-1, Box 4, IHF: Statutes and Registration Documents, 2003 – 2007, Statutes of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (as amended through 20 November 2005), p.8).

There seems to have been little sustained or regular communication among the National Helsinki groups. The IHF served as the central body for the Member Committees. However, concerning specific projects, seminars, and conferences there was some communication between National groups. There was a level of collaboration regarding certain projects, seminars, and conferences. However, this collaboration was sporadic at best. Once again, during the inception of the IHF and the creation of the Secretariat there was intense collaboration between groups and actors. However, as National groups focused more on conditions in their respective states, such collaboration occurred less often.

#### **Evaluating the CHC**

The CHC (CsHC) was not really distinguished among the National Helsinki groups. There was an expectation that the CHC was a leader within post-Socialist states of Central Europe. However, there is little evidence to support that claim. Therefore, the CHC (CsHC) was no more relevant than the National Helsinki groups in the other Visegrád states or in the former Soviet Republics. Furthermore, in terms of both influence and leadership, the CHC (CsHC) was influential at the national level, but had no more international influence or leadership than the majority of IHF member Committees.

The main actors of the CHC (CsHC) were Jiří Hájek and Libuše Šilhanová, and Martin Palouš. Although both were members of the Board of Directors, Jiří Hájek's, the Chairman, tenure was cut short due to illness, and Libuše Šilhanová also eventually served as Executive Director. Moreover, Jiří Hájek and Jana Chržová, former Executive Director, were clear norm entrepreneurs within the CHC. All three are featured prominently in communique with IHF, in various articles and publications, and in internal CHC documents.

The CHC and Slovak Helsinki Committee (SHC) were the constituent units of the CsHC and all three organizations exists concurrently in 1992. The "Velvet Divorce" led the CHC to focus on issues in the Czech Republic, primarily: the rights of children, the rights of prisoners, Czech law, police misconduct, the judiciary, and was integral to creating the office of Ombudsperson in the Czech Republic. The structure of the CHC, at the height of its influence, included a Center for Free Legal Assistance, a Refugee Counseling Center, a Citizenship Counseling Center, a Human Rights Documentation Information Center, along with the staff devoted to human rights monitoring and education.<sup>3</sup>

3 See Appendix C

The CHC had no leadership role within the IHF or among the National groups. The relevance of the CHC was as a national human rights organization. The leadership of the CHC reached its zenith at the national level and diminished over time. Neither did the CHC receive any direct mandate from the IHF, but the CHC was involved in the PHARE project that resulted in the creation of the Human Rights Documentary Centre located at the CHC office in Prague. The CHC was also responsible for writing an annual report to submit to the IHF, as well as contributing membership fees.

Within the IHF, unsurprisingly, the SHC is the National group with which the CHC communicated with most regularly. There seems to be few partnerships outside of the IHF. There was some cooperation regarding conferences and seminars. Especially with the Swiss Helsinki Committee from 1993 to 1995. As such, cooperation by the CHC was just as likely to involve a National group outside of the Visegrad states.

Thus, the CHC was a typical example of a National Helsinki group from a post-Socialist state. The CHC response to IHF dissolution was one of disappointment. The IHF provided direction and a viable network for the CHC to pursue funding and publish human rights reports in English. The Czech Helsinki Committee published a quarterly Bulletin, "Zpravodaj" for a number of years. Because the publication only exists in Czech, it was not included in this analysis. However, the CHC did partner with other national Helsinki groups and NGOs for Human Rights seminars and to create publications on Human Rights Education. Invariably, the IHF was involved in some form. The CHC also submitted an annual report, in English, to the IHF as well. The issues addressed in those reports and the educational seminars have been used to identify the CHC's activities and salient topics.

#### Conclusion

The Open Society Archive's collection of Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights contains ample information for scholarly examination and in-depth analysis of the entire history of the IHF. This research report represents the level of analysis capable of being produced by a first stage research with two months of archival access. The material gathered from the OSA is broad in scope, significant in detail; ample to pursue further academic work. This report seeks to provide insight into the structure and history of the IHF and the CHC, establish the boundaries of its geographic network, and determine the actors, funders, and best practices to be utilized by modern HROs.

The structure of the IHF has been explored in limited detail. It is clear that the Secretariat in Vienna provided coordinating and communication support for the National Helsinki groups. However, the Secretariat provided little in terms of funding and operational support. Though the Vienna Secretariat was influential, published numerous reports and letters, and established seminars and conferences throughout Europe, it was the National Helsinki groups that were responsible for monitoring human rights conditions within their respective countries. The CHC is an excellent example of a National Helsinki group that continuously reached out to the IHF for financial support, while also honoring its member obligations to produce annual reports and send modest membership fees.

The CHC continued to expand its purview after Czechoslovakia split, and even established special counseling centers for target groups. Norm entrepreneurs and leaders such as Jiří Hájek and Libuše Šilhanová, and Jana Chržová were responsible for bringing human rights issues to the forefront for dissidents in Czechoslovakia during Socialism, and for developing the CHC into a human rights NGO with the means to address targeted issues. Through analyzing the reports, structure, and partnerships of

the CHC, it is clear that the organization focused intently on: Czech legislation, judiciary, & citizenship, police misconduct, rights of children, rights of prisoners, minority rights, and refugees and asylum seekers.

The IHF focused on expanding its network to include National Helsinki groups throughout Europe and Central Asia, to publish annual reports on human rights violations within the OSCE member states it represented, to publish special reports on significant human rights violations (e.g. Georgia, the former Yugoslavia), in holding conferences and symposiums, conducting meetings and seminars, and developing partnership opportunities with the OSCE, the EU, and to a lesser extent the CoE. Although scholarly analysis has linked the IHF with the Constructivist argument in International Relations, this report merely acknowledges the link to changes in the framing of human rights by national governments, IOs, NGOs, and academics. The lack of any clear international influence by the IHF, other than naming and shaming campaigns, on the OSCE member states requires further study outside the scope of this report.

Finally, the IHF best practices are intrinsically tied to its structure. The federated structure allowed for independence and autonomy of National Helsinki groups. The loose network allowed the IHF to sprawl across Europe and develop ties to activists and dissidents working in Socialist and post-Socialist states. The volume of publications and annual reports concerning member states adds insight into the development of human rights as a policy agenda. The international meetings, seminars, conferences, and symposiums allowed an exchange of ideas, knowledge, and culture that helped shape the nature of cooperation between the "West" and post-Socialist states. However, these are also part of the IHF's shortcomings that should serve as examples to HROs in operation today. The loose reporting structure and autonomy at so many levels led to embezzlement at the Secretariat and to the closure of National

Helsinki groups. The Executive Directors seemed for focused on individual participation in international events than establishing a sustainable international network of Helsinki groups. Through further investigation of the material gathered at the OSA and utilizing proven qualitative and quantitative analytical technique, future examination of the IHF can readily yield more relevant results for researchers, academics, CSOs, and HROs.

## **Further Analytical Techniques**

## Theoretical Foundations

Organizational Theory

International Relations Theory

European Integration Theory

## Analytical Methods

Content Analysis

Discourse Analysis

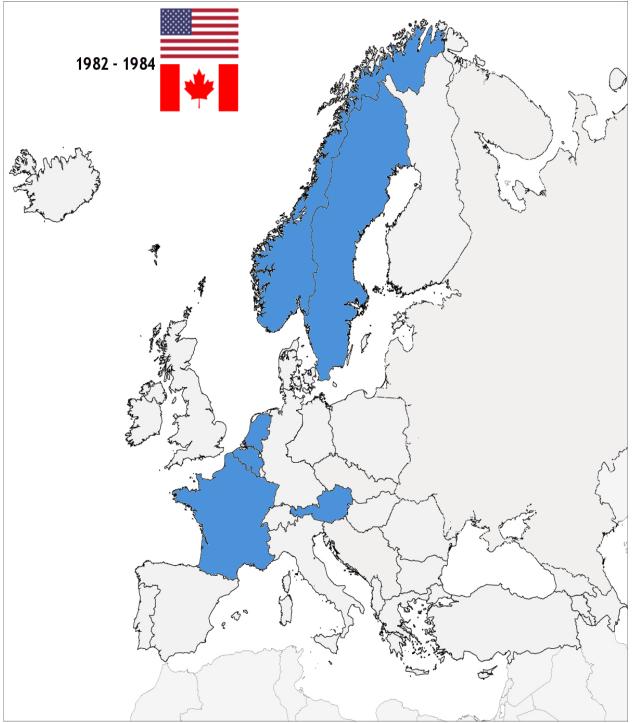
Network Analysis

Time-Series Analysis

Regression Analysis

## Appendix A:

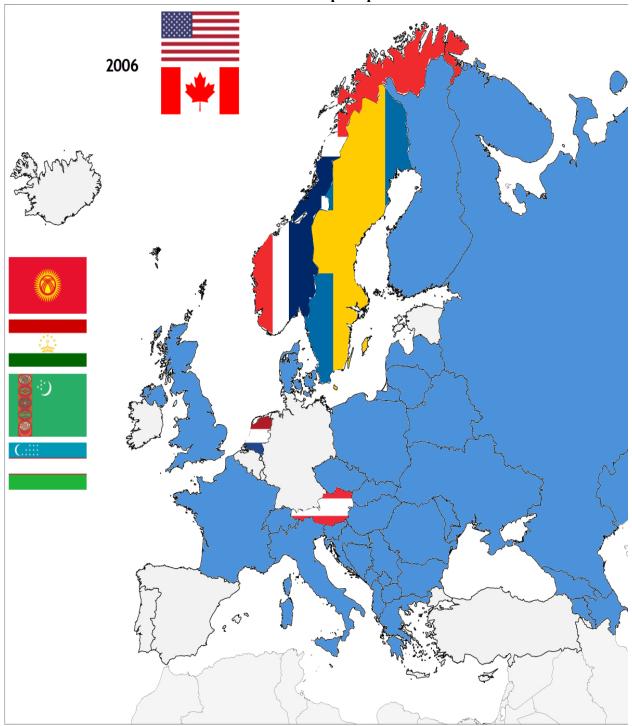
# IHF Membership Map – 1982



Canadian and US flags represent members not shown on map.

## **Appendix B:**

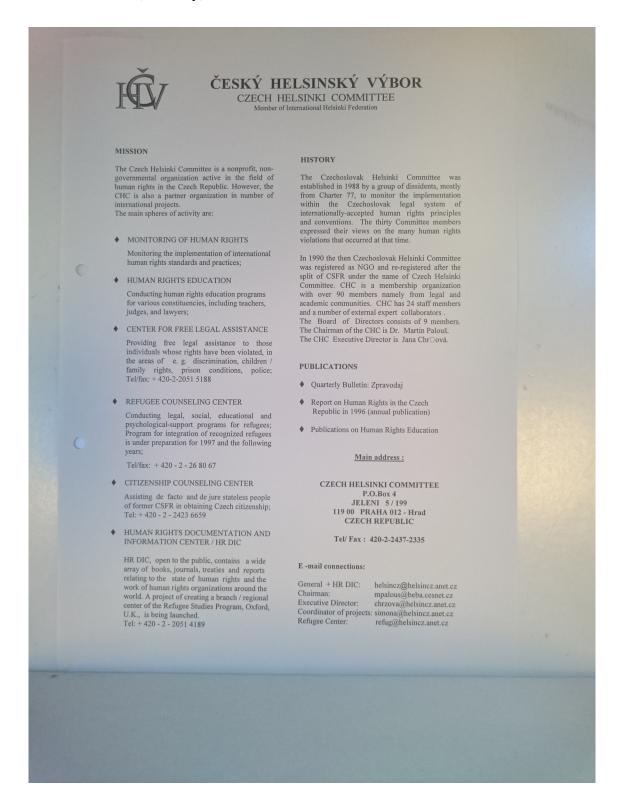
## **IHF Membership Map 2006**



Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan flags represent members not show on map. Austrian, Canadian, Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, and American flags represent Helsinki groups with the longest membership in the IHF.

### **Appendix C:**

## Mission, History, and Structure of the Czech Helsinki Committees



### **Abbreviations**

**CoE** ... Council of Europe

**CSCE** ... Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe

CSO ... Civil Society Organization CHC ... Czech Helsinki Committee

CsHC ... Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee

**EU** ... European Union

**HRO** ... Human Rights Organization

IHF ... International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights

IO ... International Organization

NGO ... Non-governmental Organization

**OSCE** ... Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

UN ... United Nations

#### Resources

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