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MR. CLARK DEPLORES VIOLATION OF
HUMAN RIGHTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, released today the text of a letter delivered on February 24, 1989, to the Foreign Minister of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Mr. Jaromir Johanes, on the harsh sentences imposed on the renowned playwright Vaclav Havel and others for their participation in peaceful demonstrations commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the death of Jan Palach.

Mr. Clark's letter reads as follows:

"Excellency:

I was deeply distressed at the time of the conclusion of the Vienna Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe to learn of the brutal treatment of peaceful demonstrators in Prague, who were commemorating the anniversary of the death of Jan Palach. The display of violence and the detention of playwright Vaclav Havel and approximately twenty other persons during the closing of the Vienna Meeting could only cast doubt on the intention of the Czechoslovak government to live up to its commitments of the Vienna Concluding Document. In particular, I refer to an undertaking to allow individuals and groups to meet freely and express views regarding the human rights record of their government and to exercise other fundamental liberties.

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Secretary of State
for
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État
aux
Affaires extérieures

Canada

I am also saddened by the news that on February 21, 1989 Vaclav Havel received a sentence of nine months and that the other persons who were arrested with him are also being sentenced. I cannot regard the peaceful act of laying flowers to commemorate a death as an act of "hooliganism" obstructing the public order. Nor, following the Vienna Meeting, can my comments be regarded as intervention in Czechoslovak internal affairs, since we all recognize that questions of human rights and fundamental freedoms are essential to security and therefore legitimate subjects of discussion.

At a time when East-West relations are showing positive signs and some countries are taking steps to improve human rights, we in Canada hope that this process will continue to show progress in all signatory states.

I therefore strongly urge your government to reconsider its position in this matter and I hope for the early release of Vaclav Havel and the other detainees. "