

Human Rights: Some Perspectives¹

by

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¹The remarks in this paper are essentially those presented as a Keynote Address to the SIGMOD 1986 International Conference on the Management of Data, Washington, D.C., May 28, 1986. I wish to thank the SIGMOD Organizing Committee and especially my friend and colleague Dr. Nicholas Roussopoulos for inviting me to speak about my work in human rights for computer professionals.

I am pleased to have an opportunity to discuss my work in human rights for computer professionals, as this work relates to our colleagues not only in the computer profession, but to those of us who are in the field of databases. I am proud to be a member of the SIGMOD community whose primary objective is 'the storage, retrieval and updating of abstract data objects,' and the Association for Computing Machinery, an organization one of whose primary focus is 'the soul of a machine', and yet these two organizations have not lost sight of an even higher abstract calling, 'the soul of mankind.'

Recently, many of us have had the good fortune to be able to attend the 1986 ACM - SIGMOD International Conference on Management of Data held in Washington, D. C.. We were there to discuss and to exchange knowledge, in a forum open to all individuals from all countries. Papers at the conference were selected on the basis of quality, not on any other basis. Science knows no boundaries. It is done for the benefit of all mankind and should be available to all individuals.

Unfortunately, our ability to freely discuss and disseminate knowledge about computing, to work in our chosen field, to attend conferences that we wish to attend, and to have our work measured by the truths of science and not politics is not shared by all of our database and computer colleagues throughout the world. Because of non-scientific considerations, some of our colleagues have been murdered, some are in jail, others are in exile in their own country, some are prevented from publishing papers in journals or attending conferences in their own country, some have been dismissed from their scientific jobs and others are trying to emigrate to countries where their human rights will not be violated.

In this paper I will discuss some of my activities in the field of human rights for computer professionals; why I believe it is important for organizations and individuals to be involved in human rights; how these activities help our colleagues; and what SIGMOD members can do to help their fellow computer professionals.

In discussing these topics I will be referring to particular human beings and events, and not to abstract data objects.

I am a member of several different organizations whose aim is the protection of the human rights of scientists. I will, however, address my remarks to the work that I do as Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights of the ACM, and as Vice-Chairman of the Committee of Concerned Scientists, since this work is devoted towards the support of computer professionals.

One might remark that people who are not computer professionals and who are not scientists also have their human rights violated. Why not be concerned about all of these people? Certainly, my father was a dressmaker. Why aren't I concerned with the human rights of dressmakers? The fact of the matter is that I am concerned with them, but as a private individual. However, "Among dressmakers I am not a Christian Dior," while among computer professionals I am known as a computer professional. When computer professionals speak out about individuals whose human rights are violated in their field, or when physicists speak out about physicists or dressmakers about dressmakers, it can make a difference. For, if we do not stand up for our fellow workers, who then will stand up for them? If we do not cry out about injustice when it arises, when will we ever cry out?

In my work for the ACM I am involved in a number of activities. My main activity is to publish a report, "Computer Professionals Whose Human Rights Have Been Violated"; I also encourage the ACM to write letters in support of computer professionals; and try to assure that international conferences are held according to international standards.

I have written three reports which list all computer professionals throughout the world whose human rights are known to have been violated. I receive information from many sources and, in almost every instance, I try to find two sources to verify the facts. This is done to assure that the information is reliable and that situations are neither exaggerated nor false. Some data is obtained from organizations known to be reliable, such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science or the Congressional Helsinki Committee. Some other organizations from which I receive information are the Committee of Concerned Scientists, the Committee in Support of Solidarity, newspapers such as the **New York Times**, and individuals whose reliability is

unquestionable. With respect to each individual I try to determine from the source whether or not the person in question wishes to be listed. It is not our intent to make problems for individuals who do not want to be listed.

We have received reports of violations from a number of different countries. Computer professionals from Argentina, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Pakistan, Poland, Roumania, Uruguay, and the Soviet Union have been listed in at least one of the three reports I have published. Indeed, after my invited talk at SIGMOD, one of our colleagues in the database field told me about his having been placed in front of a firing squad three times in Chile, only to be spared at the last possible instance, merely because he did not support the regime. I have also recently heard from a computer professional who was placed in jail in Iran, because she was of the Bahai religion and would not convert to a different religion. In the 1981 report there were 50 computer professionals listed whose human rights were violated, in the 1982 report 95 were listed and in the 1985 report 195 were listed. Of the 195 who were listed, there were 51 who either were jailed or had been jailed and there were 3 individuals exiled in the Soviet Union. Undoubtedly there are other countries where violations exist that deprive other computer professionals of their basic human rights. However, we have received no information about other countries or individuals.

I will discuss some of the individuals who appear in my list.

In Argentina, prior to the current regime, we all have heard about individuals who disappeared. At least two such individuals were computer professionals. Of the two we know about, each was abducted by a paramilitary group in the still of the night and, in front of their children, they were dragged away. Neither Robert Ardito nor Hilda Garciela Leikis De Alvarez Rojas have been heard from or seen since 1978. They have simply joined the ranks of the disappeared. We have made inquiries about them to the previous and the present regime, to no avail. Both were undoubtedly murdered either by the paramilitary groups that abducted them or by the previous regime in Argentina. Technically they remain among 'the disappeared'. When my first report was published, I sent a copy of the report to the families of these people. I received a response from relatives of both families. One was from two elderly aunts of Rojas who were in their late 80s.

They thanked me and the ACM for publishing the report and stated that their niece was their last living immediate relative and pleaded for me to continue to try to find her. I was moved to tears after reading the letter.

In Pakistan, Jamil Omar, who received a Ph.D. in computer science in England was placed in jail for attempting to distribute pamphlets, titled "Jamhoori Pakistan" (Democratic Pakistan). The pamphlets were reportedly of left wing tendency, supporting the then government of Babrak Karmal in Afghanistan. The publication of all political literature is prohibited under martial law in force in Pakistan. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, the ACM and other organizations protested this action to the Pakistani government. Because of the protest by scientific organizations, the Pakistan government was forced to try him in court. He was given a seven year sentence. Many thought that he would have been sentenced to death were it not for the intervention by scientific organizations. Fortunately, Jamil had a better fate than our Argentinian colleagues. Shortly after his sentence he was finally released from jail. His release was surely a result of pressure placed on the Pakistani regime by the scientific organizations, including the ACM.

In Poland we have received word that a distinguished computer professional and Professor of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Jan Borowiec was arrested on October 30, 1985. He is an expert in compiler construction. His crime is that the authorities had found an inoperative large offset printing device in his garage. The printer was being repaired, presumably with the intention of its being used for publications outside of official Polish censorship. It is not clear what Borowiec's role was in repairing the printer. The charges against him are of a criminal nature, potentially associated with 5 to 25 years in prison. Borowiec is known to our database colleague, Dr. Tomasz Imielinski of Rutgers University, who can testify to Borowiec's integrity as an individual and as a distinguished computer professional. Borowiec is 50 years old, has a wife and two children, a boy 13 and a girl 9. He is not well and his imprisonment adversely affected his already weak health. The Polish Association for Computer Science (PTI) and some leading Polish scientists sent a letter to the authorities asking for Borowiec's release, but to no avail. I requested that Anthony Ralston, Chairman of the Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights of the

ACM, write a letter requesting that Borowiec be released. He received no response from the Polish government.

The Borowiec jailing appears to be independent of previous jailings that took place several years ago when there was a crack down by Polish authorities on Solidarity, the Polish trade union. As part of this crack down, we received word that 45 computer professionals had been arrested or given jail sentences. I am pleased to report that most, if not all, of those who had been arrested or jailed have been released. Indeed, we have heard, recently, that Borowiec was released from prison and that no charges will be filed against him. It will be interesting to learn how Poland will overcome the technological gap in computing if they are going to restrict hard copy devices. It will be a long time before personal computers are permitted in the hands of the general populace. Every personal computer is a potential printing press.

By far, the Soviet Union is the country with the largest number of violations of the human rights of computer professionals. In my 1985 report there are a total number of 134 Soviet computer professionals listed. Of these, there were 11 in jail, 3 who were in exile and were not permitted to live in their home city, and the remainder had been denied an exit visa. I am pleased to report that as of the last several months, five have been permitted to emigrate and one less computer professional is in jail. As is well known, Anatoly Shcharansky, who now refers to himself by the first name, Natan, has been released from prison and now resides in Israel. It would be well to review Shcharansky's case.

Shcharansky is a unique individual. He was both a refusenik, that is, he wanted to receive an exit visa from the Soviet Union and a dissident, one who wants to change things in the Soviet Union. Very few computer professionals in the Soviet Union who want exit visas are also dissidents. They do not want to make changes for the better in the Soviet Union, they simply wish to leave and to start a new life. Shcharansky's dissidence took the form of his becoming a member of the Moscow Helsinki Monitoring Group, whose purpose was to monitor compliance by the Soviet Union of the Helsinki Accord. As is well known, for his boldness in this area, he was falsely accused by the Soviet government as a spy for the United States. There was no evi-

dence for Shcharansky being a spy, and it was denied by the U.S. government in an unusual statement to this effect by the then President Carter. It is also of interest to note that almost every single member of the Moscow Helsinki Monitoring Group is in jail or has served a jail sentence because of their involvement with this group.

The ACM took an active interest in Shcharansky because he wrote his Master's thesis in chess playing by computers and because an innocent computer professional was being accused falsely. My involvement with him came even before he was sentenced. I met his wife Avital when he was first charged and was imprisoned awaiting trial. After meeting this amazing woman I was convinced that Shcharansky was an innocent man and I became an ardent advocate for his cause.

During the nine years that Shcharansky was imprisoned, his wife relentlessly went around the world advocating his case. She marched the halls of Congress and may have met every Congressman and Senator. She met with several Presidents on a number of occasions. In addition, ACM Presidents wrote letters on his behalf to the Soviet Academy of Sciences and I highlighted his plight in my reports. In France, scientists and even Communists joined Mrs. Shcharansky in support of her husband in an unprecedented march down the Champs Elysee. Her objective was to keep her husband in the eye of the public so that he would not be forgotten. His travails in prison: sentenced to hard labor, going on hunger strike because he was denied permission to write or receive letters to his mother, his being placed in solitary confinement because of his protests against illegal actions by the authorities and his problems with heart trouble were brought to the attention of the world.

The Reagan administration took another route. They worked quietly behind the scenes to effect Shcharansky's release. They did not want to make a public issue of human rights. In the end, the Reagan administration was able to secure the release of Shcharansky. They did so by trading a spy for a non-spy. The Soviets were able to achieve two objectives: one they seemed to be softening their stand on human rights and they obtained one of their spies who had been imprisoned. It should be clear to everyone that the release of Shcharansky is no signal that the

plight of the refuseniks or dissidents in the Soviet Union has changed.

I believe that both the public and private discussions were important. Had Mrs. Shcharansky not publicized the plight of her husband and kept him before the world, there would have been little reason for the Soviets to release him. He would have continued to decay in jail as a warning to others in the Soviet Union as to what would happen to them if they were to move out of line with Soviet policy. In this case there is a happy ending, the Shcharansky's are reunited and have recently had a child, Rachel.

I would like to discuss two other computer professionals who are having problems in the Soviet Union. One is a dissident, while the other is a refusenik. Tatyana Osipova, a computer programmer, is a dissident whose crime is that she belonged to the Moscow Helsinki Monitoring Group. She was arrested May 1980 and sentenced to five years of hard labor and five years of internal exile for "anti-Soviet slander". Her husband, Ivan Kovalyov has also been imprisoned on similar charges. Osipova went on hunger strikes in 1983 to get the authorities to allow her to correspond with and see her husband, whom she had not seen since she was permitted a one-half hour visit with him in April 1981. Although there is no specific legal provision prohibiting meetings between prisoner husbands and wives, the Soviet authorities assert that such meetings are not allowed. Andrei Sakharov, the noted Soviet physicist, made a special appeal to the West for Tatyana Osipova and Ivan Kovalyov in February 1984. Sakharov called Osipova's hunger strike "an act of love and despair." She is now in a woman's political camp and still has not been granted permission to meet with her husband.

The sagas of Avital and Anatoly Shcharansky and of Tatyana Osipova and Ivan Kovalyov are the modern day Russian love tragedies. They are today's true life tragedies that one reads of in the Russian novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevski.

The last individual I would like to talk about is one of our own, Haim Kilov, a databasenik. Kilov was born in 1943, has a wife who is an English translator and a daughter who is studying chemistry in the University. Kilov is a member of both the ACM and SIGMOD. He has, in recent years published review articles in the **SIGMOD Record** and the **Computing Reviews**

as well as in mathematical journals. Kilov was dismissed from his job at the Latvian University in Riga after requesting permission to emigrate in 1978. Although he is now employed in the Light Industry Research Institute in Riga, he is barred from having or lecturing to students. Apparently the act of requesting an emigration visa is evidence of scientific incompetence. Kilov has been denied an exit visa on several occasions. The reason for his refusal is that, "He has closer relatives in the Soviet Union than he has outside of the country." Dr. Ben Shneiderman of the University of Maryland corresponds with Kilov and received a letter in which Kilov states that he is forbidden to publish in the Soviet Union. In another letter to Shneiderman, this time from Boris Schein, an ex-refusenik and friend of Kilov's, he states, "Kilov was told, in written form by the Vice-Head of the International General Post Office in Moscow that ACM publications are confiscated because they are forbidden in the Soviet Union." Fellow ACMers and database advocates, we are all engaged in subversive activities.

Were they not true, the above stories would be hardly believable. Who would make up such ridiculous stories?

We might ask, does publicity help and, if so, what might we do? There is no doubt that publicity is essential and that bringing the plight of our colleagues to the attention of the world is important. Anatoly Shcharanky's release is testimony to this fact, as is the release of Jamil Omar. Letters that I have received from Roumanians who have appeared on my list, from colleagues in Poland who have urged me to continue to publish names of individuals whose rights have been violated and from many Russians testify to the importance of making the plight of our colleagues known. In a recent visit to the Soviet Union in late December 1985 and early January 1986, Noah Prywess, a Professor of Computer Science at the University of Pennsylvania met with Haim Kilov. Prywess reports that, in Kilov's opinion, "...being listed in the human rights annual review by Jack Minker in the **ACM Communications** is very important to his safety." He further states that he has a problem with not being able to meet the costs of maintaining his ACM membership.

What can we do? It would be most appropriate if the database community were to adopt Haim Kilov. We could pay his ACM dues, probably from the profits of SIGMOD conferences. We could write to him, and send him scientific papers.² He is a prolific letter writer and would welcome corresponding with you. I am certain that those of you who correspond with him will find it to be a rewarding experience.

Before I conclude, I would like to quote you a part of Andrei Sakharov's remarks, delivered by his wife, in her acceptance of Sakharov's Nobel Peace Prize in 1975. His remarks were, again printed in the **New York Times** in May 1986, in celebrating Sakharov's 65th birthday in May 1986. He said:

We must fight for every individual and against every act of injustice and against every violation of human rights. So much in our future depends on this.

In struggling to defend human rights, we ought first and foremost to protect the innocent victims without demanding the destruction or total condemnation of the regimes we hold responsible. We need reform, not revolution. We need a flexible, pluralist, tolerant society which will foster a climate of free inquiry and debate and the open-minded use of the successes of all social systems. What is detente? What is rapprochement? We are concerned not with words but with a willingness to create a better and more decent society, a better world order.

The SIGMOD International Conference on the Management of Data made a statement by inviting me to address them on the topic of human rights as it applies to computer professionals and the database community. I am pleased to have the opportunity to bring these remarks to the broader database community who were not able to attend that conference. I know that our colleagues whose human rights have been violated throughout the world are honored to have their plight brought to the attention of their colleagues. The database community has made a statement that the plight of their colleagues will never be forgotten. On behalf of all our oppressed colleagues I express my heartfelt thanks for your support.

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