

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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76-169

Congress Pressures USSR
To Release Georgi Vins

By W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--The 94th Congress, for the first time in history, passed a resolution asking the Soviet Union to honor its constitution and its international agreements relating to religious liberty.

Specifically, the Congress asked for the release of imprisoned Baptist minister, Georgi Vins, and that all other Christians and religious believers in Russia be allowed to worship God freely according to their own consciences.

Introduced by U. S. Rep. John Buchanan Jr. (R.-Ala.) and co-sponsored by one third of the members of the House of Representatives, the resolution was earlier approved overwhelmingly and sent to the Senate. The measure reached the floor of the Senate on the closing day of the 94th Congress, under the leadership of U. S. Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D.-Wash.) and co-sponsored by Senators Hubert H. Humphrey (D.-Minn.), Clifford P. Case (R.-N. J.), and Ted Stevens (D.-Al.).

Congressional leaders are continuing in consultation about ways and means to present this resolution to the government of the Soviet Union and to exert the pressure of world opinion on the Russians.

The Congress has previously approved resolutions on behalf of Soviet Jews and intellectuals who have undergone oppression because of their political and religious beliefs.

Vins, secretary of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB), a dissenting group numbering about 100,000, is serving a 5-year sentence at hard labor. He was convicted for religious activities which, in the United States, are considered routine duties of a minister.

Congress selected Vins "as a symbol of the denial of basic human rights by the Soviet Union" in order to dramatize the difficulty that free thinkers and dissenters, both religious and intellectual, face in Russia.

A concurrent resolution passed by both houses of Congress does not have the effect of law, but it does express "the sense of Congress." Such resolutions often set basic policy positions and can be used effectively to achieve objectives that do not require legislation.

The full text of the concurrent resolution on Georgi Vins follows:

"Whereas Christians and other religious believers in the Soviet Union are being persecuted simply because they desire to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience and the precepts of their faith rather than according to the dictates of the state;

"Whereas a symbol of the denial of basic human rights by the Soviet Union is the imprisonment for five years at hard labor of Georgi Vins, secretary for the Council for the evangelical Christians and Baptists, for the alleged crime of administering to the congregation that elected him as their pastor, and the continuing persecution of the Vins family, which for three generations has suffered imprisonment and death in imprisonment for preaching the Baptist faith;

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"Whereas the continued denial of this fundamental human right in the Soviet Union could have adverse implications for the growth of amicable relations between our two countries; and

"Whereas such Soviet policy contravenes the spirit, if not the letter, of the Helsinki Agreement and, by so doing, raises serious doubts as to the commitment of the Soviet Union to that agreement; and

"Whereas the activities for which Georgi Vins has been imprisoned would not be considered crimes in most of the civilized world and under no circumstances could justifiably result in the imposition of such a harsh sentence; and

"Whereas Georgi Vins' release is essential on humanitarian grounds given his poor health and the likelihood that he cannot survive his present imprisonment:

"Now, therefore, be it resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring) that it is the sense of Congress that Georgi Vins should be released from imprisonment and that the government of the Soviet Union should allow him and all other Christians and other religious believers within its borders to worship God freely according to their own consciences, as the Soviet Union is committed to do by the provisions of its constitution and by the provisions of the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which the Soviet Union has ratified."

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Missionaries Survey Needs
After Ecuador Earthquake

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10/8/76

QUITO, Ecuador (BP)--Relief needs for the province of Cotopaxi, shaken by an Oct. 5 earthquake, can be met without the immediate aid of Southern Baptists, according to Southern Baptist missionaries.

Missionary James P. Gilbert went immediately to the site of the earthquake's epicenter, the town of Pastocalle, and confirmed the damage reports made by State Department officials.

W. Eugene Grubbs said both the acting ambassador to Ecuador and the missionary report fewer than 10 people were killed and that food and water supplies are ample. Homes, housing 6,000 to 7,000 people, were damaged but only in rare instances did a roof or wall cave in, said Grubbs, the board's disaster response coordinator.

The U. S. Agency for International Development (AID) is standing by to ship tents if there is a request from Ecuadorian officials.

Grubbs said that if Southern Baptists become involved it will be at a later time to rebuild homes. "The important thing," he said, "is Southern Baptists were there and knowledgeable about conditions if they had been needed."

FMB Sends Relief Supplies
To Mexico Disaster Area

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LA PAZ, Mexico (BP)--A plane carrying \$10,000 worth of construction materials to begin the rebuilding of homes destroyed in floods following Hurricane Liza is being sent to La Paz by Southern Baptists.

The materials, purchased by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, are being sent as requested by the mayor of La Paz and through a cooperative effort of the sister city of La Paz, Redondo Beach, Calif., and the Southern Baptist General Convention of California (SBGCC).

Gene Wolf of the language missions division of the SBGCC, will accompany the materials. He will also go as the fraternal representative of the Foreign Mission Board.

A staff member of California Baptist language missions division has been acting as a liaison, working out arrangements between Redondo Beach and La Paz.

W. Eugene Grubbs, disaster response coordinator for the Foreign Mission Board, has been in contact with officials in both cities, the state of California and the SBGCC for the past week.

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"The Foreign Mission Board is happy to join with the city of Redondo Beach and the California Baptist Convention in this gesture of humanitarianism, concern and compassion to meet some of the longer term needs of victims of the recent hurricane and flood," Grubbs said.

Southern Baptist Missionary Lee Baggett and the pastor of the La Paz Baptist Church were to meet the plane on its scheduled Oct. 13 arrival date.

Other Baptist relief work in Mexico has included the purchase of \$10,500 in plastic sheets for shelter and food to relieve flood victims in Los Mochis. Wyatt W. Lee, Southern Baptist missionary there, headed that project.

Mexican doctors and a Baptist missionary doctor were on the scene within a few hours offering emergency aid. The Foreign Mission Board immediately authorized the expenditure of at least \$25,000 in relief efforts.

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Court Refuses to Back
Down On Death Penalty

Baptist Press
10/8/76

By Stan L. Hasteley

WASHINGTON (BP)--During the first week of its new term, the U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way for resumption of the death penalty and took other actions relating to parochial aid, sectarian colleges, church property, discrimination, freedom of speech, and obscenity.

As expected, the high court stood behind its June decision declaring that the death penalty does not violate the U.S. Constitution's ban on "cruel and unusual punishment" and may therefore be imposed by the states on some convicted murderers. The June ruling upheld capital punishment laws in Georgia, Texas and Florida. At the same time, so-called "mandatory" death penalty statutes in North Carolina and Louisiana were struck down.

Of the nearly 600 inmates currently on death rows in 30 states, roughly half are now subject to execution in the wake of the high court's latest holding. It remains uncertain when executions might resume, although some state officials now say it may be six months or longer.

From a legal standpoint, inmates awaiting execution now have only one last recourse--a pardon from the governor of their state.

The court's latest action came about as a result of a technical appeal which is open to anyone who loses his case before the Supreme Court. Immediately after losing last June, attorneys for the convicts who appealed to the court to strike down the death penalty filed a petition for rehearing. The petition was presented to Justice Lewis F. Powell, who in turn presented it to the entire court. As is almost always the case, the justices rejected the petition.

In another action, the justices declined to schedule for oral arguments a case brought by a group of Pennsylvania parents seeking reimbursement for expenses paid to nonpublic schools. Two lower federal courts had already ruled against them.

The parents were seeking removal of a court injunction which forbade Pennsylvania state officials from making payments of \$75 per child enrolled in elementary schools and \$150 per child in secondary schools. Such provisions had been written into a 1971 law by the state's legislature but were struck down by the Supreme Court in a 1973 ruling. That case (*Sloan v. Lemon*) declared the law unconstitutional because its "primary effect" was the advancement of religion.

In an action involving Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., the high court refused to review a complaint by a faculty member who claimed the school violated his constitutional rights by paying him on a lower scale because he is a clergyman.

The priest argued further that the university violated the free exercise of religion and establishment clauses of the First Amendment by receiving federal funds while refusing to comply with federal government hiring regulations.

In its action on church property, the justices sided with local members of the Noah's Ark Methodist Church in Georgia, who insisted that their church's hierarchy could not force them to relinquish their congregation's property. Trustees of the local congregation, which has since withdrawn from the Methodist Church, argued that continuing efforts by the general church body to require them to place a trust clause in the deed to the property were illegal.

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The high court also refused to overturn a decision by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals which held that the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club, of Miami, Fla., may continue to have an all-white, all-Christian membership. The club, which denied in a written statement to the court that it has a discriminatory membership policy, has never had a Jew or a black as a member. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith had urged the high court to take on the appeal. Two of the nine justices, Thurgood Marshall and William J. Brennan Jr., voted to hear the case.

In a case involving sex discrimination the justices declined to review a District of Columbia woman's appeal that the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) violated her constitutional rights by refusing her membership application to the all-male organization. A lower court had ruled that the VFW, despite being a congressionally-chartered group, is sufficiently independent from government control to establish its own membership requirements.

The high court also refused to hear an appeal from a professor at McKendree College, a United Methodist-affiliated school in Illinois. The professor claimed his rights were violated when the school's board of trustees fired him after he allegedly made critical remarks in his roles as president of the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors and as faculty advisor to the student newspaper.

In an obscenity case, the justices let stand a lower court decision that the state of Pennsylvania's anti-pornography law must conform to guidelines set down by the Supreme Court three years ago. At that time, the court held that local communities and states may enact anti-obscenity laws to regulate materials which, when taken as a whole, appeal to prurient interest and do not have serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

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CORRECTIONS

In BP story mailed 10-7-76, entitled "Hastey Given Executive Status By Baptist Agency," change Hastey's title in graphs 1 and 3 from director of denominational relations to director of denominational services.

In BP story mailed 1ⁿ-5-76, entitled "Church Closes in Laos; Warns Thai Christians," delete the word "Baptist" from the lead paragraph. Thanks.

--Baptist Press