Support of Shcharansky, Soviet dissidents, urged

I would like to bring to the attention of the members of the IEEE Computer Society the case of Anatoly Shcharansky and a recent resolution passed by the ACM relating to that case. Shcharansky is a Soviet computer scientist who, upon denial of permission to emigrate to Israel, became active in support of other Soviet Jews who had been denied exit visas, and in monitoring Soviet compliance with the Helsinki agreement on human rights. He was arrested in March 1977, and was held incommunicado until his recent trial. The proceedings were a travesty of justice. He was charged with treason, convicted, and given a 13-year sentence. The charge was based on the accusation that he had cooperated with the CIA. This has been denied by President Carter.

Recently the ACM passed a resolution stating "...in view of Russian restrictions on scientific freedom and on the freedom of computer people, the Council of the Association for Computing Machinery hereby resolves that ACM will not cooperate with or co-sponsor any meetings to be held in the USSR and will question at appropriate times ACM participation in other international computer activities with dominant or very heavy Russian support."

Andrei Sakharov, the Nobel Prize winning physicist and the most prominent of dissenting Soviet scientists, responded to this resolution in a letter to the ACM (coauthored by Nohim Meiman) saying "We would like to express to you our deep gratitude for your resolute actions on behalf of Anatoly Shcharansky. You have hit just the right nail... The Soviet authorities extremely appreciate the cooperation in science and technology, thus there is nothing to induce them so factually and effectively as a refusal to maintain this cooperation... Your courageous and noble stand is not simply ethically best, but the only practical one. Do not believe and do not take seriously any assertion that your decision allegedly could only embitter the Soviet authorities and aggravate the situation of Soviet scientists. Do not doubt that your humane and professional solidarity will bring positive results."

I urge the IEEE Computer Society and each individual member to speak out on behalf of Shcharansky and other Soviet scientists who, for various reasons, find themselves in similar situations (e.g., Orlov, Ginsburg). While it can be argued that ties and communication in science and in other areas may, in the long run, serve to moderate Soviet policy, it is also true that the treatment of these scientists cannot be ignored. Some measured response is called for. The Russians must be made to understand that their actions are outrageous and that scientists in this country will not go on conducting business as usual. The IEEE Computer Society should follow the lead taken by the ACM.

A break in scientific communication is a moderate and measured response by the scientific community here to protest the treatment of fellow scientists there.

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