

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

Helsinki on the Hill Podcast

“Agents of the Future: The 45th Anniversary of the Moscow Helsinki Group”

Guests:

**Dmitri Makarov, Co-Chair, Moscow Helsinki Group;
Sarah B. Snyder, Professor, American University School of International
Service and Author, “Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War:
A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network”**

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TIERSKY: Hello and welcome back to Helsinki on the Hill, a series of conversations hosted by the United States Helsinki Commission on human rights and comprehensive security in Europe and beyond. I'm your host, Alex Tiersky.

Listeners, this episode celebrates the 45th anniversary of the oldest active Russian human rights organization, the Moscow Helsinki Group. The creation of the Moscow Helsinki Group was announced on the 12th of May in 1976, a day that the chairman of the United States Helsinki Commission Senator Ben Cardin has called, quote, "One of the major events in the struggle for human rights around the globe."

The 11 founding members, including luminaries such as Yuri Orlov and Lyudmila Alexeyeva, legends of the human rights movement, they came together as what was formally named the Public Group to Assist in the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act in the USSR. Their mission was to monitor the Soviet government's implementation of the human rights provisions of the historic 1975 Helsinki Accords.

Listeners, in this episode we focus our discussion on the Moscow Helsinki Group and its members, who are also sometimes referred to as the Helsinki monitors. We'll talk about their history, their impact, and their inspiration of the creation of other Helsinki Monitoring Groups in Ukraine, Lithuania, Georgia, and Armenia. Finally, we'll talk a bit about the important work the Moscow Helsinki Group continues to do today.

I'm honored to be able to welcome to our podcast two extremely distinguished guests. Let me first introduce, calling in from Moscow, Dmitri Makarov, one of the three co-chairs of the Moscow Helsinki Group. Dmitri, welcome to Helsinki on the Hill.

MAKAROV: Yeah, thank you. It is an honor.

TIERSKY: Well, thank you so much for joining us. And let me formally extend our best wishes and congratulations on this important anniversary for the Moscow Helsinki Group.

Listeners, I want to also bring in now Professor Sarah Snyder, our second guest. Dr. Snyder, welcome to Helsinki on the Hill.

SNYDER: Thank you for having me.

TIERSKY: Absolutely. Now, you are a historian. Dr. Snyder teaches at American University's School of International Service. And she is the author of the award-winning book, "Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network," from Cambridge University Press. Again, Dr. Snyder, Sarah, thank you so much for being here.

Let me start with you. I'd like to ask – I'd like to start by asking you to help our listeners understand the history of kind of where this all started. What led to the creation of the Moscow Helsinki Group and the broader transnational human rights movement? So could you set the scene for us? Take our listeners back to this period in the mid-1970s, during the Cold War?

What was the climate in the international system, in Europe specifically? How did we get to this extraordinary diplomatic breakthrough of the Helsinki Final Act? Over to you.

SNYDER: Certainly. Well, for three years 35 European and North American countries had negotiated essentially the hope initially – this was a long-time Soviet proposal – to find some way to really recognize the end of World War II in Europe. And the goal of these diplomats who worked together for so long to try and reach this agreement, which became known as the Helsinki Final Act or the Helsinki Accords, was to find a way to sort of breach the East-West divide. Both for governments, but also for individuals. And this was something that I think was quite revolutionary for the time, was that there was a part of the agreement that explicitly focused on human contacts. Things like family reunification, the rights of journalists.

And so even though it was an agreement that was negotiated by diplomats, it didn't just govern relations between states but also between and among peoples. This agreement was signed on August 1st, 1975, in Helsinki, Finland. Thus, the name. And for some people, this was the culmination. This grand ceremony in Finlandia Hall was sort of the culmination of years of diplomatic efforts. But for other people, for dissidents, for human rights activists, this was just the beginning. And one of the reasons that it really spurred a sort of flourishing of human rights activity was a number of commitments that were made in the agreement.

And one of them was what's come to be known as the follow-up mechanism. And this was that the parties were going to meet again in 1977 in Belgrade. And they were going to review the ways in which governments had been implementing the agreement. And so this opened up a lot of opportunities for groups and governments to be engaging in monitoring activities. And we see this most prominently in the Soviet Union and the United States in the years immediately following this agreement.

So part of what's, I would say, such a breakthrough, as you put it, is the content of the agreement itself. But then activists really picked up the agreement and reframed sort of the way it was going to be used, instead of just kind of celebrating, perhaps, the Soviet general secretary at the time Leonid Brezhnev's great diplomatic achievements, and turned it around for their own purposes, to use it to highlight the ways in which human rights were not being fulfilled in certain countries and for certain populations.

TIERSKY: Clearly the Helsinki Final Act breakthrough, as you talk about – as you discuss it, it's – the countries agreed to hold each other to account with this follow-up mechanism that you described. And that seems to be a particularly powerful tool.

Dmitri, let me – let me turn to you. I know you're not a historian, but I'd love it if you could kind of take us back to what this period looked like in Russia and the Soviet Union at the time. What were the conditions for those who were advocating for human rights? Who were the main players involved? What did it look like during the period of the Helsinki Final Act's negotiation and signature?

MAKAROV: I actually think that for many dissident voices in the Soviet Union, that Final Helsinki Act was in many ways a giveaway to the totalitarian state, kind of a recognition of

its occupation of Eastern Europe. And the human rights commitments in the act, by many, were not seen as something which takes us further from, for example, obligations in the Universal Declaration. But the visionary character of Yuri Orlov and other founders of Moscow Helsinki Group actually turned that around, as Professor Snyder has noted, and turned it into a powerful tool actually focusing on assisting the Soviet Union and other countries in following their common obligations in terms of complex security, which includes human rights, which includes rule of law, and so on.

There is a story that and Lyudmila Alexeyeva used to tell, that Yuri Orlov had some day – some spring day in Moscow has called her and asked her if she has actually read the Helsinki Accords, because it was one of the few acts that had human rights commitments which was actually published in Soviet Union. The Universal Declaration for Human Rights, for instance, was seized during searches and was not published at all. This kind of achievement of Soviet diplomacy was published, but nobody took it seriously.

And she, being one of the founders, also did not take it seriously. And it took a lot of efforts on behalf of Orlov to convince her and other fellow members to actually join. And you know that Andrei Sakharov, whose centenary was just celebrated, was also reluctant in joining any groups of that sort also because that assistance part looked very dubious for many. In that age then people were imprisoned for their beliefs and persecuted on kind of an everyday basis.

TIERSKY: Dmitri, you've made it clear that the founders themselves, let alone the kind of broader population, were very skeptical of the Helsinki Final Act and of its possibilities, and that the work itself was dangerous. How do we get from this general skepticism to the actual launching of a Moscow Helsinki Group that has a mission of monitoring the implementation of the commitments in the Soviet Union?

MAKAROV: You base your action on a simple assumption that the human rights are tied to common security, and that states have common obligations to follow those guarantees. So basically, the revolutionary breakthrough came in that realization that security is not only about missiles, it's not only about economic wellbeing. It is also about human rights of a country's people. And in that sense, it is an area of common concern for the entire group of states that signed the accords.

And that turned the whole Cold War kind of approach, that it was kind of a diplomatic battle between two sides, into an area of common cooperation of various dissident groups that were based on different premises that worked for different agenda. And that was a revolutionary breakthrough that happened in May '76. And the reaction by the state, that right away saw a danger, followed very soon. Yett the movement was born, and other groups sprung up in other countries and it was already unstoppable.

TIERSKY: Dr. Snyder, Sarah, let me bring you back in here. Dmitri has just mentioned what was happening in other countries. Can you help our listeners understand the extent to which this kind of spark or realization – as Dmitri has put it – about what the possibilities of using the Helsinki Final Act in this concept of comprehensive security where military security

and environmental security and human rights, these things – rule of law – they're all related in what leads to – or what prevents interstate conflict. What did this look like elsewhere?

SNYDER: So the Commission that you work for, the Helsinki Commission, formally the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, was established within a month of the Moscow Helsinki Group. May and June of 1976. And if I just told you that, you might think that there was a very similar process to the one that we've just heard about, that people in the United States read about the Helsinki Final Act in the newspaper and mobilized to create a monitoring group.

But actually, the seeds of both of these organizations were planted in the Soviet Union in 1975. Millicent Fenwick, the Republican member of Congress from New Jersey who initiated the legislation that created the commission, was on a congressional delegation to the Soviet Union in 1975. And she met with Soviet dissidents, including Yuri Orlov. And he said to her: We really need to have pressure from the West as well. This can't just be dissidents working on sort of internal monitoring. We need external allies.

And she was so impressed by her conversation with him, by the passion and the commitment that she saw in other dissidents that she met with, that when she got back to the United States she began an effort to create a body that was made up of members of the executive branch and the legislative branch that would monitor compliance with the agreement in the lead-up to the meeting that I mentioned, that would be held in Belgrade in 1977.

And so both of these sort of early groups kind of came out of the inspiration of Yuri Orlov and other Soviet dissidents. And they developed a very close working relationship over time. Members of the Moscow Helsinki Group would find ways to get their documents that really in great detail showed ways in which their government was not upholding the agreement, would make their way to the Commission. When Lyudmila Alexeyeva was forced into exile, she continued to work with members of the Commission and with other groups in the United States.

And so this was really the beginning of a sort of flourishing of dissent in the Soviet Union. Other groups were established in other Republics. And then in Eastern Europe, whether it was in Poland or in Czechoslovakia, we see either formal groups or maybe more informal movements development also inspired by this idea that the Helsinki Final Act should be monitored. And over time they come to really – to not just be sort of different isolated groups, but to really form a network. Sometimes they're meeting in person. In other instances, they're communicating by telephone. They are communicating by smuggled documentation. Sometimes they're using foreign journalists to share messages.

But over time, they come to coordinate their strategies. And this culminates in 1982 with the establishment of the International Helsinki Federation. And this is kind of a formal umbrella group to try to bring together previous disparate Helsinki groups, both in Eastern Europe, in Western Europe, and in what were at the time known as the neutral and nonaligned countries. Those were the sort of three main groupings that made up the membership that had signed the Helsinki Final Act.

And I would say that one other thing that might interest some of our listeners is that at the time of the establishment of the Helsinki Commission, the United States really wasn't very interested in the Helsinki Final Act. President Gerald Ford and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, they thought that this was something that was important for detente, for a relaxation of tension in the Cold War. But they didn't have great hopes that the agreement would really lead to a sort of reduction of tension or might even help facilitate the end of the Cold War.

And it's really during the Carter administration, when that meeting that I mentioned in Belgrade was held, that you have a reversal of the U.S. position. And the United States formally becomes an ally of dissidents of human rights activists. And I think that that's really important because, as Dmitri mentioned, very soon after the Moscow Helsinki Group is announced the Soviet government is quite effective in arresting, exiling, and they called it sort of using prophylactic measures to blunt some of the impact of the group's work.

And so having high-level allies outside of the Soviet Union who could raise the reporting that these groups were doing – or, the monitoring that these groups were doing, I think, was really important. And it ensured that even as more effective repressive measures were taken against human rights activists in Eastern Europe, that attention was still paid to their plight at these international meetings that importantly, after Belgrade, were held at a sort of sequence or a kind of cycle of years. There was a meeting that was held in Madrid from 1980 to 1983, in Vienna from '86 to '89. And so they ensured that a lot of attention remained focused on the ways in which governments were not fulfilling their Helsinki commitments.

TIERSKY: Sarah, thank you for that. And coming back to one of your initial points, I mean, it aligns very well with what Dmitri said about some of the initial skepticism regarding what the Helsinki Final Act could mean, that it wasn't limited just to dissidents in the Soviet Union initially but also in the United States and elsewhere in the West there was a great deal of skepticism. But I think it's fascinating the way that those initial sets of commitments have created this process that you described through the Belgrade meeting and others. And that today they're represented in the organization that we know as the OSCE, among others. And you've kindly mentioned the Commission – the Helsinki Commission, that I work for.

And of course, we're here to talk about the Moscow Helsinki Group. So, Dmitri, let me – let me bring you back into the conversation because I'd like to ask you, you know, we've talked about the theoretical framework. We've talked about the spark of the movement. What was the work? What was the work initially in the early days of the Moscow Helsinki Group? How does a group of 11 brave individuals – who have other careers, they have their lives, there's clearly danger to them – what is it precisely that they do to try to hold Soviet authorities to account for the commitments that they've made in this – in this document and on human rights?

MAKAROV: Well, actually that story continues to amaze me, because back in the era when there was no internet and the communication was much harder, this group of individuals managed to collect appeals, to collect applications, to collect materials throughout the Soviet Union, actually. Sometimes they had to travel to remote regions. Sometimes they met with people in their apartments. And then they took out the emotions, leaving the factual information behind it. They sent it out to all signatories of the Helsinki Accord, printing it out on the, you

know, typing machines, not on computers. And they had to be really creative sometimes in passing that information to foreign journalists, to foreign diplomats, and so on. And that's how it became public and then was raised by the allies in foreign media or in diplomacy circles and the international attention was drawn to some of the issues of persecution of religious groups, of national minorities, psychiatric treatment, different forms of censorship, topics that were not before that covered in that much detail. There was a lot of focus on political prisoners, for instance, but some of those other human rights issues were not in the publicity focus. And that was a main, also, achievement of the Helsinki monitors, to produce the monitoring of and documentation of various forms of government abuse in the human rights field.

TIERSKY: Dmitri, listeners – regular listeners to this podcast have had the opportunity to hear from human rights defenders. And I think I – certainly, I'm always struck by the courage to risk so much – whether it's careers, family, even their lives – by advocating for the human rights of others. Can you talk to us a little bit about the conditions that they worked under and some of the price that was paid for this work? And, Sarah, if you'd like to jump in after Dmitri if you'd have anything to add. Please.

MAKAROV: Well, prison terms and exile were the usual response by the government, and most of those people then struggled to find jobs in the areas being even the renowned physicist like Yuri Orlov, for instance, or a historian like Lyudmila Alexeyeva. All of that is in the memoirs, which I encourage you to read because they give a much more detailed firsthand account of how life was back then in the Soviet Union. And, yes, the courage is inspiring. And the fact that even in exile or even in prison camps those people continued on that path is even more inspiring and encouraging, I guess.

TIERSKY: Sarah, would you like to add anything?

SNYDER: Yeah. I just wanted to go back a little bit to what Dmitri was saying about the methods of these human rights activists because allies in the West – whether we're talking about foreign journalists or, say, members of the – of the Helsinki Commission, or over time Helsinki Watch in the United States – they knew that an enormous amount of research and sort of independent verification and interviews and documentation had gone into putting together each of the documents that the Moscow Helsinki Group produced, which meant that they – the group developed an incredible reputation for thoroughness, for reliability. And so when a Moscow Helsinki Group document arrived in the West – whether, you know, we're talking about broadcasters on Radio Free Europe or Radio Liberty, or political figures – they knew that they could count on it to be accurate.

And so I think that's one of the things. It's not just – obviously, these activists were incredibly courageous and creative in the ways that they did their work, but they were also excellent researchers and documenters of these human rights violations. And I think that's one of the reasons that the group was so quickly so significant internationally, was that they really set an example for all of those that followed them in terms of the type of work that they were doing.

And you know, I completely agree with Dmitri. These memoirs, they tell stories of incredible sacrifice for these monitors: years separated from their families, unable to do the type

of professional work that they trained for and are passionate about, real health consequences of being in prison camps, of being in internal exile. And so enormous sacrifices by people like Yuri Orlov, Anatoly Sharansky, Lyudmila Alexeyeva. And the memoirs are really compelling reads for people who are interested in learning about the conditions that these monitors faced, why they were motivated to undertake this incredibly risky work that they were doing, but also the collective spirit that they felt.

I think that the group dynamic was actually really very powerful for a lot of people – the camaraderie that developed of working together, of pooling expertise. That was, I think, one of the great innovations of the very beginning of the Moscow Helsinki Group, that you had people who were experts on, say, the plight of Jews in the Soviet Union, and then others who were focused on freedom of expression or freedom to publish, and they brought their different sort of expertise together to monitor the agreement in a really comprehensive way. They were one of the first groups that were focusing on human rights in a very broad sense as opposed to groups that were – that were established, say, just to focus on the plight of people facing torture or just to focus on the plight of someone facing religious discrimination.

So there really are just so many ways in which this was an organization that was really unique. And I think that's why it came to have such power, both domestically in the Soviet Union in terms of the ways in which it was replicated and also seen as a threat to the government but also the ways in which its members took on such significance for people outside of the Soviet Union. You could see publications that would have photos of Yuri Orlov on the cover because people wanted to keep his plight, as he was in prison and then in internal exile, at the forefront of diplomats and other people's minds because he was seen as such a significant figure in this movement.

TIERSKY: Thank you for that.

Dmitri, please.

MAKAROV: Yeah. And one thing that amazes me still is the intellectual prowess that comes with this work, because in many ways those people reinvented the notion of human rights. Because, I mean, they were kind of outside of the general context of discussion. As I said, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for instance, was not accessible. The scholarship on this was not reachable. So, basically, they invented the notion of *pravozašitnik*, which in Russian language has a different context than human rights defender. It's the person who defends the law, the spirit of the law to be more exact. And this is what they appeal to, the spirit of the obligations. It's not just words on paper. It's the commitments that you have to follow.

And I think that's a reminder to many of the governments in place now that say that there are hard commitments and there are commitments that are less binding. Those are still promises. Those are still obligations. Those are still commitments. And if you're honest and true to your word, then you should follow them. And that was the honest kind of an appeal to honesty and integrity that came for those Soviet human rights defenders that risked their lives to speak that uncomfortable truth to power.

TIERSKY: Dmitri, thank you.

I do want to turn our conversation to a discussion with you. I want to ask you a few questions about the Moscow Helsinki Group today and the work today. But before we do that, I do want to have an opportunity to kind of encapsulate this question of legacy. We've been talking about the uniqueness of these activists and the founders of the Moscow Helsinki Group. How did they assess their own impact and influence and, for lack of a better word, their achievements? What did they move forward? How did they assess the importance of their own work? Would either of you like to comment on that?

MAKAROV: Well, I can jump in with my – some memories of my brief interactions with Yuri Orlov, which in many ways are very humbling because he was a very – very short, very soft-spoken man who focused for most of his life on physics. When he was forced to leave Soviet Union, he was also – kind of he came back to the work that he loved, to physics. So in a way he felt that his mission was complete when he launched the group, and then he just wanted to do physics. Of course, I mean, he remained an active contact to the Helsinki groups and he came to some of our meetings and we discussed the future of the Helsinki movement. He was very much engaged and involved in that. But there was nothing about him that would speak about him overblowing his historical impact; rather, on the contrary.

And it was the same with Lyudmila Alexeyeva, which was also very conscious of the achievement of the Helsinki movement but was very modest about it. And it was kind of like this is what we had to do. (Laughs.) So it was quite a humbling experience. And you know, when you are on that caliber of historical greatness, I might say, I mean, you can afford to meet with leaders of state and look at them as kind of instruments in your mission. And I think that's a true approach. (Laughs.) So she met with all those heads of state, from American presidents to Russian presidents, and she talked to them about her mission – about human rights in Russia and in post-Soviet states – with the same kind of soft-spoken but very firm approach which was kind of reminiscent of those years in the '70s and '80s.

TIERSKY: Sarah?

SNYDER: I would say, maybe stepping back and thinking about their impact on a broader geographic scale, first, I think we can see that they played a direct and indirect role in the transformation of Europe and the peaceful – largely peaceful end to the Cold War, but also I think in really laying the groundwork for a broad international human rights movement by the end of the 20th century. I was talking earlier about very specifically focused groups and how the Moscow Helsinki Group was broader, and I think then the movement became even broader. And I think that the Moscow Helsinki Group and the founding members played a significant role in that as well.

TIERSKY: Thanks, Sarah.

As I mentioned, Dmitri, I'd like to turn and ask you just in the few minutes we have left a few questions so that our listeners are aware of kind of where the Moscow Helsinki Group is today, what you're working on, and what conditions you're working under. I've heard you say

elsewhere that the Moscow Helsinki Group, in comparison to maybe other groups or individuals in Russia, has a kind of a – I think the term you used was a kind of a special status because of its historical legacy. I wonder if you could say a little bit more about what you meant by that.

MAKAROV: Well, yes. The funeral of Lyudmila Mikhailovna – passed away in 2018 – was attended by both Putin and Navalny. And in Russia which is as divided as it is now in terms of political opposition, that probably was the only event which they would attend together. And that kind of attests to the history. And that kind of legacy still lives with us in trying to work in current conditions, and that legacy is vulnerable and also burdensome. And a special status comes with that historical legacy.

But also, Moscow Helsinki Group is the oldest functioning group and it is also the one that does not focus on a single issue. You know, there are many professional groups that focus, for example, on help to those detained during the last protests, to victims of torture, to LGBT activists, to women's rights, and so on. We try to retain a larger focus and we try to focus on institution building. Moscow Helsinki Group in many ways is an institution in itself. And we also think that our role and mission is to assist other human rights groups in terms of raising awareness of different issues, in terms of supporting them in their work, especially in the regions, bringing in newer generation, things like that, and a focus on infrastructure and supporting the movement as a whole, not just a loose association of professional NGOs.

TIERSKY: If I am hearing you correctly, it sounds like there's been quite a transition from the first days of documentation of specific issues that would be brought to international attention to a kind of capacity-building role for civil society writ large in Russia. Do I understand that correctly?

MAKAROV: Yes, that is also true, although documentation is still a huge part of our work and monitoring on all current issues beyond a single-issue focus. And there are many blind spots. Just a while ago, for instance, we released a website that focused on deaths in custody, since there are no official statistics. I mean, there are deaths at the hands of the police in Russia and in other countries as well. But in Russia, that topic is not covered as much and the media is not concerned by the authorities, and those are blind spots that should draw the attention of human rights community similar to enforced labor in camps, which continues to be widely practiced, things like that. I mean, Russia remains a huge – a huge country even without other Soviet republics, and it remains a country with not very well-established human rights record to put it mildly. And in that sense, the work of human rights defenders is just as important now as it was back in the day. It just takes different forms.

TIERSKY: Dmitri, I think many of our listeners will be aware in Russia there are so-called foreign agent laws and undesirable organization laws that are intended to target human rights organizations. I'd like to ask you, keeping that in mind, are you optimistic about the future of civil society in Russia? And tell us a little bit more about, you know, what you see as your sources of optimism and your sources of biggest concerns with the work of both the Moscow Helsinki Group and broader civil society in Russia today and going forward.

MAKAROV: Yes. The foreign agent legislation is an attempt to actually highlight human rights movement as agents of the West while we consider ourselves actually agents of the future. And I like that attitude of Lyudmila Mikhailovna which actually looks at the foreign dignitaries as instruments in achieving our mission, and that's an approach that I'd – (laughs) – I'd like to take further. So I would rather see OSCE representatives, for example, be our agents, or Council of Europe representative being our agents, than the other way around. But of course the government plays with that label, which has a very negative context, and tries to say that we are Western-driven powers.

Our response to that – and one of the reasons why Moscow Helsinki Group is not, actually, on the foreign agents list – is that we don't take foreign assistance money and we try to mobilize support inside Russia. Moscow Helsinki Group has launched the first human rights endowment in Russia, focusing on kind of a long-term investment into human rights activity. And we also try to support – try to promote citizen mobilization and citizen engagement in the human rights movement. And that's probably the biggest difference from the Soviet era, where there was no way to connect in such a way to society and there was much more need to rely on assistance from abroad.

But having said that, we also remain very true and very committed to a sort of international solidarity and international cooperation. We maintain contacts with Helsinki groups. We maintain contacts with colleagues from all the post-Soviet republics. We are very active right now working on issues in Belarus and also on the Russian-Ukrainian dialogue. So we are very much committed to international cooperation, which is very much in the spirit of the human rights movement. And in that sense, we say once more that we're not foreign agents; we are agents of humanity, for whom human rights, rule of law, pluralistic democracy should be common values. We may discuss and we may differ of how those things can be portrayed and perceived in different countries, but if there are legal obligations then there is no place for argument aside from arguments in the courts, and the commitments should be followed. The values that are behind those commitments we consider universal, but the commitments are commitments.

TIERSKY: Dmitri, thank you very much for that. And, Sarah, thank you as well. There's so much that we could talk about that we haven't had the opportunity to get to. Dmitri's comments just now, it made me think of we could have an entire conversation on obstacles to the rule of law. We haven't talked about the role of social media today or disinformation. And we haven't spent nearly enough time, I think, talking about specific cases outside of Russia, even though our focus is on the Moscow Helsinki Group.

Before I conclude this episode, I just wanted to give you the opportunity for any final words. Sarah, please.

SNYDER: Sure. I just – I found that phrasing of agents of the future so powerful. I think that we've talked in this episode about the many ways in which the founding members of the Moscow Helsinki Group really revolutionized human rights monitoring, human rights activism, and had such a powerful impact on the Cold War and on human rights activists around the world. And the work that the Moscow Helsinki Group continues to do is just so

inspirational, and I think for our listeners is a really strong message about the ways in which people outside of government can still have a really powerful impact and effect change in significant ways.

TIERSKY: Thank you.

Dmitri?

MAKAROV: Yeah. And I actually also would like to thank you for giving us an opportunity to speak to your audience because I think it is this type of people-to-people contact that is especially important in the age of when there is social media manipulation, fake news, and so on. The challenges that human rights movement in Russia faces are not just challenges for us as Russians or for us as human rights activists; they're universal challenges. Just like you can name a few other – climate change, for instance, and problems of racism, they are universal problems – of torture, problems of degradation of universal legal norms. Those are all common problems for us as humanity to solve.

So, yes, we should be focused on our local work. I believe in that very much. But we should also reach out to other agents of the future or agents of humanity and think together what could be done. So I encourage your listeners to do that, both on the local and maybe international/global scale as well.

TIERSKY: Well, thank you, Dmitri, and I hope you'll consider us here on Helsinki on the Hill as part of your toolkit of instruments – (laughs) – in the service of universal values addressing our common challenges and serving as agents of the future.

Dr. Snyder, Dmitri Makarov, I'd like to thank you both very much for this excellent conversation, and especially for the work that you have done and that you will continue to do. The legacy of courage and fortitude in the struggle for human rights clearly continues today in the Moscow Helsinki Group's current work. Thank you both so much for helping to highlight that for our listeners.

With that, you've come to the end of another episode of Helsinki on the Hill. Listeners, as always, we love to hear your feedback. And if you got to this podcast, you know where to find us. Thanks again for joining us. Until the next conversation, I am Alex Tiersky signing off.

(END)