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December 17, 2008

Dmitrii Medvedev, President
Russian Federation

Dear Mr. Medvedev,

We are writing on behalf of the American Historical Association to express our intense concern over the violent raid on the offices the Russian human rights organization Memorial on December 4, 2008. The American Historical Association is a non-profit membership organization founded in 1884 and incorporated by the United States Congress in 1889 for the promotion of historical studies and the dissemination of historical research. It is the oldest and largest professional historical organization in the United States, bringing together nearly 5,000 institutions, 118 affiliated societies and more than 14,000 individuals, including college and university faculty, public historians, independent scholars, archivists, librarians, and secondary school teachers.

Our members are students and teachers of all fields of history, including Russia and the former Soviet Union. We are now hearing from some of those members who have visited Memorial in St. Petersburg and conducted research there and know first hand that its holdings are critical to independent research on the Soviet period of Russia's history. The confiscation by the police of eleven hard drives of documentary material from this archive now endangers a documentary collection of internationally recognized importance. Historians in the United States are now becoming increasingly concerned, especially those who wish for a more positive relationship with colleagues and students in the Russian Federation in an atmosphere of the rule of law and the protection of human rights stated in the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

The American Historical Association calls on the authorities in St. Petersburg to return the wrongfully confiscated materials to the Memorial's offices so that they can once again be available to current and future scholars who so highly value this unique archive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gabrielle H. Spiegel".

Gabrielle Spiegel, President

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Arnita A. Jones".

Arnita A. Jones, Executive Director

Cc: Sergei V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Valentina Matvienko, Governor of St. Petersburg
Vladimir Lukin, Russian Federal Ombudsman for Human Rights
Sergei I. Kislyak, Russian Ambassador
Irina Flige, Memorial Center
Beth Holmgren, President, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies