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To the Jury - Rights & Democracy - 2011 John Humphrey Award

15 May 2011.

Dear members of the Jury,

I am very pleased to recommend Professor Oleg Manaev, of Minsk, Belarus, for the 2011 Rights & Democracy John Humphrey Award. For nearly forty years, Dr. Manaev has devoted himself – at great personal and professional cost – to the struggle for human rights and academic freedom, first in the former Soviet Union and now in Belarus.

Dr. Manaev is Professor of Social Communication at the Belarusian State University in Minsk (Republic of Belarus), where he is also the founding director of the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic & Political Studies (IISEPS). Dr. Manaev's credentials are impeccable, and he has established himself internationally, in a short time, as one of the leading scholars from the former USSR. His work is an absolutely indispensable reference point for media and communication scholarship with respect to post-Soviet societies, and, even more importantly, with respect to universal themes and issues regarding democratization and human rights. He has published widely in both books and major scholarly journals and has served on the international council of the International Association for Media and Communication Research. He has also traveled widely and spent prolonged periods abroad, notably in the United States and several European countries. His work has brought him into contact with the world's academic cultures as well as with the people of many countries.

As an important figure in the political opposition in Belarus, Dr. Manaev's circumstances are such that his situation and that of his family are precarious, particularly considering that Belarus is the country which has undergone the least substantial change among the new states that have emerged from the former Soviet Union. With great courage and self-sacrifice, he has maintained a constant moral position as an activist voice for democracy and human rights. His rigorously independent intellectual stance has brought him into conflict with state authorities in Belarus, as indicated in the "Chronology of state Repressions" against him and his institute that forms part of this nomination dossier. In June 2010, 130 academics from all over the world signed a statement protesting the persecution to which Dr. Oleg Manaev continues to be subjected.

I have known Dr. Manaev since September 1989, when I first met him at an academic conference in Slovenia (then Yugoslavia), on media democratization. I believe it was his first journey beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union. He was perhaps the first “unofficial” scholar from the USSR that any of us attending that small conference had met professionally, and he immediately made a very strong impression with his courage, determination and integrity.

I have since met him again on around a dozen occasions. About a year after our initial meeting, I was delighted to invite him to Laval University in Quebec City on the first stop of his academic tour of North America. In 1993, I invited him again, to speak as a guest lecturer at the University of Montreal. Reciprocally, I had the great privilege of visiting Minsk, in 1991, and Kiev, in 1993, as a participant in conferences where he was the principal organizer. We have also met at annual congresses of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) as well as at various other scholarly events.

Dr. Manaev has a truly vast experience as both a distinguished academic and a human rights activist. He brings a wide range of expertise and worldly experience to any endeavour.

I hope these few remarks have been useful to you and remain available for further consultation if necessary.

Sincerely,



Marc Raboy, PhD

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