

# Raoul Wallenberg's biography

Written by Jan Larsson

## Foreword

By now, people in most parts of the world have heard about Raoul Wallenberg's extraordinary rescue action on behalf of the Hungarian Jews during World War II. Recent documentaries about him, produced in a number of countries, have contributed to public awareness of his role. But the 1985 American TV miniseries "Wallenberg," which has been seen by many millions of people all over the globe, has been particularly important in this regard.

During my lecture tours both in Sweden and abroad as part of the international effort to secure Raoul's release from the Soviet Union, I have often been asked how it was possible to save such a large number of people-about 100,000-from the Nazi executions. The most important answer: Raoul Wallenberg was the right man in the right place, given the situation then prevailing. Although he was not the heroic type in the ordinary sense, he was a fearless, skilled negotiator and organizer. He was, moreover, a good actor, a talent that served him well during his clashes with the Nazis. He could also show two different personalities. The first was the calm, humorous, intellectual, warm person that we co-workers could see. The second was Raoul Wallenberg in confrontation with the Nazis: he was transformed into an aggressive person who would shout at them or threaten them on one occasion, flatter or bribe them on another, as the circumstances required. They were impressed by him and usually gave in to his demands. One reason, of course, was his Swedish diplomatic status, which the Germans did not dare to violate.

The fact is that neither Raoul nor we, his co-workers, at first had any idea that his rescue action would eventually grow to such a large scale.

Raoul was forced to play for increasingly high stakes in a situation where Budapest was becoming more and more of a battlefield. The bombs were raining down, and Soviet troops were closing in on the suburbs. The last time I saw Raoul Wallenberg (on January 10, 1945) I urged him to seek shelter, especially given the fact that the Arrow Cross-the Hungarian Nazis-were searching for him in particular and that he was consequently taking a major risk by continuing his humanitarian work.

His reply was typical: "To me there's no other choice. I've accepted this assignment and I could never return to Stockholm without the knowledge that I'd done everything in human power to save as many Jews as possible."

And he continued doing so until he himself was captured-not by the Nazis, but by the Soviet Army.

**Foreword by Per Anger, Ambassador**

*Stationed in Budapest during the World War II as a Secretary at the Swedish Legation.*

# Raoul Wallenberg

In Jerusalem there is a memorial to the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis during World War II. It is called Yad Vashem and was erected in 1953. A street called "Avenue of the Righteous" runs through the area. A steady breeze blows through the leaves of the 600 trees that line the street in straight rows. They were all planted to honor the memory of non-Jewish individuals who risked their lives to save the Jews from the Nazi executioners.

One of these trees bears the name of Raoul Wallenberg, a Swede.

There are different versions as to the number of Jews in Budapest that Raoul Wallenberg saved. Some sources credit him with having saved 30,000 people. According to other estimates, the number of people who can directly or indirectly thank Wallenberg for their lives is around 100,000. Regardless of what figure is the correct one, Raoul Wallenberg is undoubtedly one of the foremost heroes of World War II.

Wallenberg did not, however, return home to Sweden as a hero when the war ended. Instead he was arrested by the Soviet troops who were marching into Budapest. The Soviet government has declared time and again that he is dead. Just as many times, however, new witnesses have appeared who have claimed that Raoul Wallenberg is-or was-still alive somewhere in a Soviet prison or mental hospital.

Raoul Wallenberg is-or was-a member of one of Sweden's most prominent families. The Wallenbergs have given their country several generations of leading bankers, diplomats and statesmen. Raoul's father, Raoul Oscar Wallenberg, was a naval officer and a cousin of Jacob and Marcus Wallenberg, two of Sweden's best-known financiers and industrialists during the half century beginning around 1930. Raoul was born on August 4, 1912, three months after his father's death. His mother, Maj Wising Wallenberg, married again in 1918, this time to Fredrik von Dardel.

Raoul's paternal grandfather, Gustav Wallenberg, took charge of Raoul's education. The plan was that he would follow the family tradition and go into banking, but he turned out to be more interested in architecture and trade.

In 1930 Raoul Wallenberg completed upper secondary school, having earned top marks in Russian and in drawing. After doing his compulsory military service, in 1931 he traveled to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor to study architecture. In 1935 he received a Bachelor of Science degree and returned home. But the market for architects in Sweden was small. Instead, his grandfather sent him to Cape Town, South Africa, where he became a trainee in a Swedish firm that sold building materials. After six months, his grandfather arranged another job for Raoul at the branch office of a Dutch bank in Haifa, Palestine (in what is now Israel).

In Palestine, he came into contact for the first time with Jews who had fled from Hitler's Germany. Their stories about Nazi persecution stirred him deeply. Perhaps not only because he had a very humane attitude toward life, but also because he himself had a few drops of Jewish

blood. After returning to Sweden from Haifa in 1936, Raoul Wallenberg did not continue in banking, but instead resumed his old interest in international trade.

Through Jacob Wallenberg's network of contacts in the business world, he was eventually introduced to a Hungarian Jew, Koloman Lauer, who ran a Swedish-based import and export firm specializing in foodstuffs.

Because Raoul Wallenberg had a good feeling for languages and could travel freely around Europe, he was a perfect business partner for Lauer. Within eight months, Raoul Wallenberg was a major shareholder and the international manager of the firm.

His travels to Nazi-occupied France, and to Germany itself, soon taught Raoul Wallenberg how the German bureaucracy operated. He had also made numerous trips to Hungary, where he visited Lauer's family in Budapest. Hungary was still a relatively safe place, though surrounded by enemies.

## **Background to Raoul Wallenberg's mission**

By the spring of 1944 the world had awakened and now realized what Hitler's "final solution of the Jewish problem" actually meant. Bits of information about the Nazi death camps had begun to leak out as early as 1942, but were considered so incredible that at first they were not taken seriously by some Allied leaders. But in May 1944 the first authentic eyewitness accounts of what was actually happening at the Auschwitz concentration camp reached the Allies.

Hitler's plans for the annihilation of the entire Jewish population in German-occupied countries became widely known. Hungary, which had joined forces with Germany in its war against the Soviet Union beginning in 1941, still had about 700,000 Jewish residents as of early 1944.

When the Germans lost the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943, Hungary wanted to follow the example of Italy and ask for a separate peace. At that point, Hitler summoned the Hungarian head of state, Miklós Horthy, and demanded continued solidarity with Germany. When Horthy refused to accept these demands, Hitler ordered the occupation of Hungary, which began on March 19, 1944. Soon the deportation trains began carrying Hungarian Jews out of their country to the Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps in southern Poland, where certain death awaited them.

The Germans began by shipping out Jews from the Hungarian countryside. But the Jewish inhabitants of Budapest knew that their fateful turn would soon come. In desperation, many of them sought help from the embassies of neutral states. The embassies issued temporary passports to Jews who had special ties with these countries.

The Swedish Legation in Budapest managed to persuade the Hungarian authorities to treat the holders of such temporary passports which it had issued as if they were Swedish citizens. They were thus exempted from having to wear the Star of David that identified them as Jews. In a

short time, the Legation issued 700 passports—a drop in the ocean compared with the hundreds of thousands of Jews who were in danger of deportation. The Swedish Legation requested that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm send more staff immediately.

Meanwhile, the World Jewish Congress was holding a meeting in Stockholm. The most important item on its agenda was to organize a rescue action for the Hungarian Jews.

In 1944 the United States had established the War Refugee Board (WRB), an organization whose task was to save Jews from Nazi persecution. The WRB soon found out that the Swedes were making serious attempts to save Jews in Hungary. The WRB's Stockholm representative summoned a group of prominent Swedish Jews to discuss names of suitable people who could travel to Budapest and initiate a major rescue action. Among the participants was Raoul Wallenberg's business partner, Koloman Lauer, who served the group as an expert on Hungary.

The group's first choice was Folke Bernadotte, chairman of the Swedish Red Cross and a relative of the King Gustav V. When Bernadotte was not approved by the Hungarian government, Koloman Lauer suggested that his own business colleague, Raoul Wallenberg, be approached. Lauer particularly emphasized that Wallenberg had already made many trips to Hungary while working for their jointly owned company. Some members of the group objected that Raoul was too young and appeared to be inexperienced, but Lauer persisted. Raoul was the right man, he argued—quick-thinking, energetic, courageous and empathetic. Besides, he had a well-known name.

Soon everyone in the group had approved the idea of approaching Raoul Wallenberg, who accepted the offer. By late June 1944, he had been appointed first secretary of the Swedish diplomatic mission in Budapest. His brief was to initiate a rescue action for the Jews. Raoul was very eager to travel to Budapest, but first he wrote a memo to the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. He was determined not to let himself be buried in diplomatic protocol and bureaucracy.

He requested full authority to deal with anyone he wanted, without first clearing the matter with the Swedish ambassador in Budapest. He also wanted the right to use diplomatic couriers outside of normal channels.

His memo was so unusual that the matter was referred all the way up to Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson, who consulted with King Gustav V before informing Wallenberg that his conditions had been accepted.

## Wallenberg's rescue actions

When Raoul Wallenberg arrived in Budapest in July 1944, time was already running out. Under the direction of Adolf Eichmann, the Germans had deported more than 400,000 Jewish men, women and children. They had been transported out of Hungary in 148 freight trains between May 14 and July 8. When Wallenberg got to Budapest, there were only about 200,000 Jews left in the capital.

Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann was now preparing a plan to wipe out the entire Jewish population of Budapest within a 24-hour period. In a report to Berlin, he had written that "the technical details will take a few days."

If this plan had been carried out, Raoul Wallenberg's trip would have been in vain. Eichmann would have implemented a "permanent solution of the Jewish problem" in Hungary. But the head of state, Miklós Horthy, received a letter from King Gustav V of Sweden containing an appeal to stop the deportations of Jews. Horthy summoned his courage. He sent a note to King Gustav V saying he had done everything in his power to assure that the principles of humanity and justice would be respected. The German deportations were cancelled. A train carrying 1,600 Jews was stopped at the border and sent back to Budapest.

Amazingly, the Germans approved the halt in the deportations. The reason may be that during this period one of the top Nazi leaders, Heinrich Himmler, was playing a high-stake game. Germany was losing the war. Himmler apparently believed he could negotiate a separate peace with the Western Allies. He may have hoped that he could improve his negotiating position by reducing pressure on the Jews. So in Hungary, Adolf Eichmann could do nothing but bide his time.

The head of the Swedish Legation in Budapest at the time was Minister Carl Ivar Danielsson. His closest deputy was Legation Secretary Per Anger.

Raoul Wallenberg became head of a special department, which was in charge of helping the Jews. Even before Wallenberg arrived, Valdemar Langlet, leader of the Swedish Red Cross, was assisting the Swedish Legation. Langlet rented buildings in the name of the Red Cross and put up signs such as "Swedish Library" and "Swedish Research Institute" on their doors. These buildings were then used as hiding places for Jews.

Wallenberg did not use traditional diplomacy. He more or less shocked the other diplomats at the Swedish Legation with his unconventional methods. He successfully used everything from bribery to threats of blackmail. But when the other members of the Legation staff saw the results of Wallenberg's efforts, he quickly gained their full support.

Raoul Wallenberg's first task was to design a Swedish protective passport to help the Jews in their dealings with the Germans and the Hungarians. Wallenberg had previously learned that the German and Hungarian bureaucracies had a weakness for external symbolism. So he had the passports attractively printed in blue and yellow (Sweden's national colors) with the Three Crowns coat of arms in the middle, and he furnished them with the appropriate stamps and

signatures. Of course Wallenberg's protective passports had no value whatever under international law, but they commanded the respect of those they were designed to influence. At first Wallenberg only had permission to issue 1,500 such passports. But he managed to persuade the Hungarian authorities to let him issue another 1,000, and through promises and empty threats to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry he eventually managed to get the quota raised to 4,500 protective passports.

In reality, Wallenberg managed to issue more than three times this many protective passports. His staff grew to several hundred people. They were all Jews, but by working for Wallenberg they were exempted from wearing the demeaning Star of David.

In August 1944 the Hungarian head of state, Horthy, dismissed his pro-German prime minister, Sztójay, and appointed General Lakatos to succeed him. The situation of the Jews improved substantially. Because of diplomatic pressure-orchestrated and greatly amplified by Raoul Wallenberg-Adolf Eichmann lost his position of responsibility for "solving the Hungarian Jewish issue."

Wallenberg now thought that his department at the Legation could be phased out and that he himself could return to Sweden. He believed that the Soviet troops who were successfully invading Hungary would soon march into Budapest.

On October 15 Miklós Horthy announced that he was seeking a separate peace with the Russians. But his radio speech had hardly been broadcast before the German troops took command. Horthy was immediately deposed and was replaced by the leader of the Hungarian Nazis, Ferenc Szálasi. He was leader of the Arrow Cross movement, which was feared at least as much as the German Nazis for its cruel methods in dealing with the Jews. Adolf Eichmann returned and was given a completely free hand to resume his previous terror campaign against the Jews.

But Raoul Wallenberg struggled indefatigably against the authorities and frequently showed up as an unwelcome witness to their atrocities. In many cases he managed to save his own Jewish co-workers from the hands of the executioners-his only weapons were his courage and firm demeanor.

Now Raoul Wallenberg began to expand the "Swedish houses." These were more than thirty buildings in the Pest district where Jews could seek shelter. A Swedish flag hung outside the door of each, and Wallenberg declared the building Swedish territory. The number of inhabitants of the "Swedish houses" soon climbed to 15,000.

The other neutral diplomatic missions in Budapest began to follow Wallenberg's example by issuing protective passports. A number of diplomats from other countries were inspired to open their own "safe houses" for Jewish refugees.

Toward the end of the war, when conditions were totally desperate, Wallenberg issued a simplified version of his protective passport, a mimeographed page that bore only his signature. In the prevailing chaos, even this worked.

Immediately after its installation, the new Hungarian Nazi government announced that all protective passports were invalid. But Wallenberg managed to make the acquaintance of Baroness Elizabeth "Liesel" Kemény. She was the wife of the foreign minister, and with her assistance Wallenberg managed to have his protective passports reinstated.

While this was going on, Eichmann began his brutal death marches. He carried out his promised deportation program by forcing large contingents of Jews to leave Hungary by foot. The first march began on November 20, 1944, and conditions along the 200 km (120 mi.) route between Budapest and the Austrian border were so appalling that even some Nazis protested.

Thousands of Jews marched in endless columns, hungry and in great suffering. Raoul Wallenberg stayed with them continuously, distributing protective passports, food and medicine. He alternately threatened and bribed the Nazis until he managed to secure the release of those who had been given his Swedish passports.

When Eichmann began shipping out the Hungarian Jews in whole trainloads, Wallenberg intensified his rescue actions. As the freight cars full of Jews stood in the station, he would even climb on top of them, run along the roof of the cars and hand bundles of protective passports to their occupants. On one occasion German soldiers were ordered to shoot him, but were so impressed by Wallenberg's courage that they deliberately aimed too high. He was then able to jump down unharmed and demand that those Jews who had received his protective passports be allowed to leave the train and return to the city with him.

Raoul Wallenberg's department at the Swedish Legation grew continuously, employing 340 people in the end. An additional 700 people also lived in the department's offices.

Toward the end of 1944 Wallenberg had moved his operations across the Danube from Buda to the Pest district, where the two Jewish ghettos were located. The minimal law and order that had previously existed were now gone. The Arrow Cross movement, the police and the German armed forces shared power in an uneasy alliance.

Wallenberg searched desperately for suitable people who could be bribed, and he found a very powerful ally in Pa'l Szalay, a high-ranking officer in the police force who also belonged to the Arrow Cross. After the war, Szalay was the only highly placed Arrow Cross member not executed. Instead he was released in recognition of his efforts together with Wallenberg to protect the Jews.

During the second week of January 1945, Raoul Wallenberg learned that Eichmann was about to set in motion a total massacre of the Jews living in Budapest's larger ghetto. The only person who could prevent it was General August Schmidhuber, commander of the German troops in Hungary.

Wallenberg's ally Szalay was sent to find Schmidhuber and hand over a note which declared that Raoul Wallenberg would make sure that the general would be held personally responsible for the massacre and that he would be hanged as a war criminal after the war. The massacre was cancelled at the last minute as a result of Raoul Wallenberg's intervention.

Two days later, the Russians arrived and found 97,000 Jews alive in the two Budapest ghettos. This brought to 120,000 the total number of Jews who had survived the Nazi efforts to exterminate them in Hungary.

According to Per Anger, Wallenberg's friend and colleague, Wallenberg must be given credit for having saved about 100,000 Jews.

## **What happened to Raoul Wallenberg?**

On January 13, 1945, the advancing Soviet troops saw a man standing and waiting for them alone outside a building with a large Swedish flag above its door. Raoul Wallenberg told an amazed Soviet sergeant in fluent Russian that he was the Swedish chargé d'affaires for the portions of Hungary liberated by the Soviets. Wallenberg received permission to visit Soviet military headquarters in Debrecen, east of Budapest. On his way out of the capital on January 17, Wallenberg and his chauffeur-with a Soviet escort-stopped at the "Swedish houses," where he said goodbye to his friends. He told one colleague, Dr. Ernő Petö, that he was not sure whether he would be the guest of the Soviets or their prisoner. Raoul Wallenberg thought he would be back within a week-but he never returned.

It is unclear whether Raoul Wallenberg is alive or not. The Russians themselves claim that he died in a Soviet prison on July 17, 1947. There are, however, indications from innumerable witnesses that he may still be alive even today.

Before we discuss Raoul Wallenberg's imprisonment, we must find out two things. First, why he wanted to establish contact with the Russians in Debrecen. And second, why they arrested him.

In November 1944 Raoul Wallenberg had set up a section in his department which, under his supervision, would write a detailed economic relief plan for the surviving Jews. The Russians did not have the same attitude toward the Jews and were probably incapable of understanding a person who had devoted all his energies to saving them. Wallenberg thus considered it important to meet with the Soviet commanders and explain his humanitarian work to them.

The Soviets probably thought that Wallenberg's work had some ulterior motive. They presumably also suspected him of being an American agent. They were certainly also very skeptical of Raoul Wallenberg's contacts with the Germans.

Wallenberg and his chauffeur Vilmos Langfelder never returned from Debrecen. According to reliable witnesses, they were arrested and taken to Moscow. They were jailed by the NKVD, an organization now known as the KGB. According to eyewitnesses, Wallenberg and Langfelder were placed in separate cells at the Lyublyanka prison.

But Wallenberg was not the only diplomat in Budapest who aroused Soviet suspicions. The Swiss Legation, too, had carried out extensive work to help Hungary's Jews. The Russians arrested a legation secretary there, along with a legation office worker, and took them to the then Soviet Union. The Swiss nevertheless managed to have them exchanged for Soviet citizens who had been detained in Switzerland.

But it took a while before people in Stockholm became worried about Raoul Wallenberg's disappearance. In a letter to the Swedish ambassador to Moscow, Deputy Foreign Minister Dekanosov declared that "Soviet military authorities have taken steps to protect Wallenberg and his possessions."

The Swedes naturally expected Raoul Wallenberg to come home soon. When nothing happened, Raoul's mother Maj von Dardel contacted the Soviet ambassador in Stockholm, Aleksandra Kollontai, who told her she could rest assured that her son was in safe hands in the Soviet Union. Around the same time, Madame Kollontai told the wife of Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Christian Günther that it was in Wallenberg's best interests if the Swedish government did not make a big fuss about him. But Aleksandra Kollontai was recalled to Russia, and the matter took a new turn.

On March 8, 1945, the Soviet-controlled Hungarian radio announced that Raoul Wallenberg had been murdered on the way to Debrecen, probably by Hungarian Nazis or Gestapo agents. This created a certain passivity on the part of the Swedish government. The new minister for foreign affairs, Östen Undén, and the Swedish ambassador in Moscow assumed that Raoul Wallenberg was dead. Most people did not, however, take the radio announcement seriously.

Many observers have drawn the conclusion that immediately after the war, Sweden had a chance to negotiate Wallenberg's release but that the Swedes missed their chance.

In 1965 Sweden's then prime minister, Tage Erlander, made a speech which is included in a collection of documents concerning efforts to track down Raoul Wallenberg. Erlander declared that all attempts to find Wallenberg directly after the war had led nowhere. In fact, Soviet authorities even denied any knowledge of Wallenberg. According to Erlander, between 1947 and 1951 nothing new of any importance occurred. But as foreign prisoners began to be released from Soviet prisons, many new bits of testimony about Raoul Wallenberg's fate after January 1945 came to light.

In April 1956 Prime Minister Tage Erlander and Interior Minister Gunnar Hedlund traveled to Moscow, where they met with top Soviet representatives including Nikita Khrushchev, Nikolaj Bulganin and Vjatjeslav Molotov. The Russians promised to investigate once again what had happened to Raoul Wallenberg.

On February 6, 1957, the Soviets announced that they had made extensive inquiries and had located a document which probably concerned Raoul Wallenberg. The handwritten document stated that "the prisoner Wallenberg, who is known to you, died last night in his cell." The document was dated July 17, 1947, and was signed Smoltsov, head of the Lyublyanka prison infirmary. The document was addressed to Abakumov, Soviet minister of state security.

The Russians said in their letter to the Swedes that unfortunately Smoltsov had died in May 1953 and that Abakumov had been executed in connection with purges within the security police. The Swedes were very suspicious of this message, but the Russians have stuck to their version to this very day.

According to testimony from various people who served time in Soviet prisons after January 1945, Raoul Wallenberg was imprisoned throughout the 1950s. This of course contradicts the Soviet government's version.

In 1965 the Swedish government published a new official report on the Raoul Wallenberg case. It had previously published a report in 1957. According to the new report, the prime minister, Tage Erlander had done everything in his power to find out the truth about Wallenberg.

The Wallenberg affair now entered a phase where not much happened. The stream of war prisoners from the Soviet Union had begun to ebb, and there were few new witnesses in the case. But in the late 1970s the Wallenberg affair was revived. Two pieces of testimony which the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs found very interesting provided the basis for a note to the Soviet government asking that the matter again be investigated. The reply from the Kremlin was the same as before-Raoul Wallenberg died in 1947. On the basis of additional material, which was regarded as reliable, Minister for Foreign Affairs Ola Ullsten sent another inquiry about Raoul Wallenberg to Russian premier Aleksei Kosygin in the early 1980s. The reply was the same as always-Raoul Wallenberg had died in 1947.

Is Raoul Wallenberg alive today? During the 1980s there was a growing interest in Wallenberg around the world. In 1981 he was declared an honorary citizen of the United States, in 1985 of Canada and in 1986 of Israel, and all over the world there is a strong belief that he is still alive and people have demanded his release from Russian imprisonment.

In Sweden and abroad-especially in the United States-voluntary associations are tirelessly continuing their efforts to find answers to the question of what happened to Raoul Wallenberg. Yet despite the opening of numerous secret archives since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, the fate of Wallenberg remains a mystery. (See Per Anger's postscript below.)

Over the past few years, the Swedish Raoul Wallenberg committee has participated in a dialogue with school pupils in Sweden and abroad on such social phenomena as xenophobia, religious conflicts and bullying, which in the worst cases can lead to the kind of persecution that triggered Wallenberg's rescue action in 1944. The recent flood of refugees into many Western European countries, coinciding with a deep recession, has caused rising social tensions and occasional outbursts of racially motivated violence, underscoring the need to intensify existing educational efforts in this field.

During 1994 alone, committee staff visited some 100 schools to speak about the need for compassion and tolerance between national, ethnic and religious groups. In the words of committee secretary Sonja Sonnenfeld, "Seven-year-olds have turned out to be the most promising in group discussions-open, daring, unaffected by peer pressure, curious and delighted to communicate. The latter quality gradually fades as children get older."

After his incomparable humanitarian efforts, Raoul Wallenberg ended up being a lifelong prisoner-a cruel and ironic fate for a man who sacrificed everything to give his fellow human beings a chance to live in freedom. But all around the world, people continue to honor him as a hero, in recognition of his courage and his struggle for human rights.

## **Postscript by Per Anger**

In May 1987 Hungary paved the way for Raoul's wider recognition in the Eastern Bloc. An impressive monument honoring his deeds for humanity was dedicated in Budapest. (The first monument there, erected shortly after the end of the war, had been removed by order of the Soviets.) In January 1989 the Hungarian Raoul Wallenberg Association was formed. In April of the same year the American Raoul Wallenberg Scholarship Committee arranged a human rights symposium in Budapest in Raoul's name, followed by a "freedom march" through the streets of the city.

During the following months extensive publicity about Raoul Wallenberg started in the Soviet mass media. A real breakthrough occurred in October 1989 when, at the invitation of the Soviet Government, Raoul's brother and sister, Professor Guy von Dardel and Mrs. Nina Lagergren, as well as Secretary of the Raoul Wallenberg Committee Mrs. Sonja Sonnenfeld, and I went to Moscow for discussions with the Soviet authorities. Before going we were assured by President Bush and Chancellor Kohl of their ardent support for Raoul's release. Prior to our visit, Dr. Kohl had on numerous occasions proven his genuine involvement in resolving Raoul's fate. He praised Raoul as "one of the greatest heroes of our century" and had urged President Gorbachov at their meeting in Bonn in June 1989 to "set this old man free."

Our mission in Moscow caused enormous interest in both national and international media. There were a number of interviews and programs on Soviet television and radio, as well as the initiation of the making of a documentary film and a movie about Raoul. During our visit we were in close contact with Andrei Sakharov who had been supporting us for many years. And the Swedish Embassy gave us most valuable help.

Professor von Dardel requested that a joint Swedish-Soviet commission be set up for further investigation: the group would include scientists, lawyers and experts on the Soviet prison system, and would look into all the appropriate prison archives. After the August 1991 coup, things happened very fast. A new state commission was formed with representatives from the Swedish and Russian governments. Archive after archive was opened for almost total access, and more than 100 documents about Wallenberg's imprisonment were found.

Regrettably, however, at the time of this writing (November 1994) the commission still has not been able to trace what really happened to Raoul. Consequently, as long as his death has not been proved, it has to be assumed that he may still be alive somewhere in the former Soviet Union.

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