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October 24, 2009

Mr. Robert L. Gibbs  
White House Press Secretary  
The White House  
Office of the Press Secretary  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Gibbs:

The American Hungarian Federation (the "Federation") is among the oldest and largest organizations in the US representing a cross section of Americans who trace their heritage to Hungary and Central Europe. We recently celebrated the Federation's more than 100 years of service at a festive event in New Brunswick that included in excess of 250 Hungarian Americans.

As you can imagine, several of our members participated in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and Freedom Fight. On their behalf and on behalf of the Federation, I am writing to thank you for issuing your statement on the 53rd anniversary of that truly historic event.

October 23, 1956 sparked a chain of incredible events that went beyond what we normally think of as an uprising. As noted by General Bela K. Kiraly:

What happened in Hungary in October and November 1956 has been called a variety of names -- "revolt," "uprising," or "counterrevolution". . . .  
*It was, however, a revolution, pure and simple.* The popular will swept away a regime that had been imposed by the Soviet Union, modeled after it, and maintained in power by its forces. Violence was not the purpose of the revolutionaries, but, when forced to, they met violence with violence. One of the most remarkable features of the Revolution – *and what made it a revolution in the real sense of the word* – was the rapid establishment of new institutions from the lowest level to the central state administration. . . . In short, democracy was at work at the grassroots . . . . (Emphasis added.) Bela K. Kiraly, "The Hungarian Revolution and Soviet Readiness to Wage War Against Socialist States," *The First War Between Socialist States: The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and Its Impact*, Distributed by Columbia University Press (1984), at pp. 4 – 5.

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And while Hungary is indeed anchored in a free Europe, not all Hungarians in the region enjoy the full benefits of democracy yet. For example, the Hungarians of Slovakia have to live with a law that criminalizes the use of their mother tongue in the public arena. Romania has failed to restore the independent Hungarian state university in Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvar that was merged into the Romanian university under the Communist dictatorship and virtually treats the legitimate request for autonomy of the Szeklerland as an act of treason. Unfortunately, other examples could be given. We believe these issues need to be addressed because an indispensable component of democracy in the region is a demonstrable commitment to respect the rights of national minorities.

Again, we greatly appreciate your helping to keep the memory of the Hungarian Revolution alive. If we can provide you with any assistance or historical information about issues of interest to our community, please do not hesitate to contact us. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Frank Koszorus, Jr.

Co-president

Chairman, International Relations

Committee