

# THE VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

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## AN OPEN LETTER

November 22, 2013

Hon. Traian Basecu

President of Romania

Palatul Cotroceni

Bulevardul Geniului nr. 1-3

Sector 6, Bucuresti

Cod Postal 060116

Romania

Dear Mr. President:

It has come to our attention that the Ethics Committee of the Order of the "Star of Romania" has revoked its award to Bishop Laszlo Tokes, an internationally recognized champion of freedom and democracy who among many honors received our Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom in 2009.

While it is the stated policy of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation not to involve itself in the domestic politics of sovereign states, it is our practice to defend distinguished awardees like Bishop Tokes when they have been grossly mistreated.

The facts about the key role that Bishop Tokes played in the Romanian Revolution of December 15-16, 1989, are well-known and beyond dispute. From his church in Timisoara, Bishop Tokes stood up against the abuses and atrocities of the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu when no else dared do so publicly. A spontaneous national movement against the Ceausescu dictatorship sprang up. Before the month of December was ended, Ceausescu and his wife had been removed from office and executed.

For his critical role in the 1989 Romanian Revolution, our Foundation awarded Bishop Tokes in the summer of 2009 our highest honor—the Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom. Other Medal awardees have included Vaclav Havel, Lech Walesa, and John Paul II. Later that year, Bishop Tokes was given the Order of the Star of Romania (Knight Rank). But now the Ethics Committee of the Order of the Star of Romania has revoked the award for alleged "anti-constitutional" behavior by Bishop Tokes and for "violating European values."

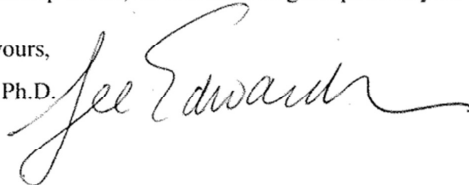
These charges are clearly unfair and unwarranted. Essential European "values" and the Romanian Constitution include the freedom of speech and the right to speak out about controversial issues. Allowing open discussion and public debate is the sign of a vibrant democracy and constitution and should not be tampered with. Bishop Tokes has headed a public campaign to change the hearts and minds of Romanian citizens regarding a minority in Romania. What could be more democratic, more constitutional?

We urge you as President of the government of Romania to demonstrate your commitment to free speech and democratic values by rejecting the decision of the Ethics Committee and not revoking the Order of the Star of Romania for Bishop Tokes, a most deserving recipient of your nation's highest honor.

Respectfully yours,

Lee Edwards, Ph.D.

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