

## THE CHABAD ORGANIZATION

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, with all the division and conflict in politics today, it would take something truly compelling to unite all 100 Senators, including Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals. Well, it has happened. This week I sent to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson a letter, signed by all 100 Senators, asking that it be conveyed to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The letter supports the decades-long quest by Agudas Chasidei Chabad of the United States to recover from Russia its collection of sacred religious texts and manuscripts.

Chabad was established in the 18th century in Russia and is today the largest Hasidic Jewish organization in the world. The organization's past leaders, or rebbes, accumulated this collection of sacred texts, which includes a library and an archive and is central to Chabad's religious life. The Soviets took control of the library in 1920 and in 1927 arrested the sixth rebbe and sentenced him to death. He was allowed to leave Russia later that year but had to leave the library behind. In 1933, the sixth rebbe and the archive moved to Poland.

In 1940, after both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland, the sixth rebbe fled to the United States without the archive. It was confiscated, first by the Nazis and then by the Soviets. Chabad has since worked to reclaim both the library and the archive.

It is important to place the letter we sent this week in its full context because this is only the latest in a long series of actions by all three branches of the U.S. Government to support Chabad's quest. Members of Congress, for example, began calling for the return of these works in the 1930s. Just weeks before the Soviet Union dissolved on Christmas Day 1991, both President Mikhail Gorbachev and a state arbitration panel ordered that the library be returned to Chabad. On January 24, 1992, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe wrote President Boris Yeltsin, urging him to carry out the court's order and return the collection.

Unfortunately, both President Gorbachev's directive and the court's order were effectively nullified when the Russian Federation replaced the Soviet Union. Within a few months, however, the U.S. State Department expressed "strong support" for returning the full collection to Chabad. On May 31, 1992, all 100 Senators signed a letter to President Boris Yeltsin urging the collection's "quick release."

On February 20, 2005, all 100 Senators signed a letter to President Putin, again urging that the collection be returned to Chabad. The letter said this: "The religious texts that Chabad seeks to retrieve consist of rare and irreplaceable books, archives and manuscripts on Chabad philosophy, Jewish religious law, prayer and tradition. . . . We urge you to return these sacred re-

ligious texts, archives, and manuscripts to Chabad, which would be a significant example of your government's commitment to justice, human rights, and religious freedom."

Chabad filed suit against Russia in Federal court. During this litigation, the United States filed statements of interest reiterating its "strong support" for returning the collection to Chabad. On July 30, 2010, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ordered Russia to return both the library and the archive to Chabad.

I am truly grateful to all of my colleagues for your support of Chabad and their effort to recover this important component of their religious life. As striking as this unity is, I hope my colleagues also see it as part of a much longer story of extraordinary faith and commitment in the face of loss and persecution. I hope and pray that such efforts will be successful and that Russia will respond favorably to Chabad's request. It would indeed be a demonstration of their commitment to justice, human rights, and religious freedom.

I ask unanimous consent that the text of the 1992, 2005, and 2017 Senate letters to which I referred be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,

Washington, DC, May 31, 1992.

Hon. BORIS YELTSIN,  
*President of the Russian Republic,*  
*Moscow, Russia.*

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: We understand that you have personally committed yourself to secure the return of the Lubavitch texts, and we appreciate your having taken a stand on behalf of an act of justice.

When the Senate was in recess, the U.S. State Department issued a statement (copy attached), with which we now wish to associate ourselves. In particular, it is our hope and expectation that you will fulfill your commitment decisively through the quick release of the Schneerson-Agudas Chabad collection.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

U.S. SENATE,

Washington, DC, February 24, 2005.

Hon. VLADIMIR PUTIN,  
*President, Russian Federation.*

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: We, the undersigned members of the United States Senate, respectfully request your assistance in returning the Schneerson collection from the Russian State Library and the Russian State Military Archive, to its rightful owners in the United States: Agudas Chasidei Chabad of United States (hereafter referred to as "Chabad").

The religious texts that Chabad seeks to retrieve consist of rare and irreplaceable books, archives and manuscripts on Chabad philosophy, Jewish religious law, prayer and tradition. The first portion of the Schneerson collection was seized by the former USSR around the time of the Bolshevik revolution and placed in the Russian State Library, where it remains to this day.

The second portion of the Schneerson collection is in storage at the Russian State Military Archive. It had been assumed that this portion of the collection had been de-

stroyed or captured by Nazi Germany during the holocaust and Nazi occupation of Warsaw, Poland in World War II. Chabad recently learned that the Soviet Army captured this portion of the Schneerson collection from the Nazis and transferred it to the Russian State Military Archive.

Chabad has worked tirelessly to secure the release of these texts, archives, and manuscripts that comprise the sacred heritage of an entire community. On May 31, 1992, the entire United States Senate collectively appealed to then-President Boris Yeltsin to honor his own commitment to return the Schneerson collection. A copy of this appeal is enclosed. Since 1992, however, a mere eight volumes have been released.

We urge you to return these sacred religious texts, archives, and manuscripts to Chabad, which would be a significant example of your government's commitment to justice, human rights, and religious freedom.

U.S. SENATE,

Washington, DC, February 27, 2017.

President, VLADIMIR PUTIN,  
*Russian Federation,*  
*Moscow, Russia.*

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: We are writing respectfully to reaffirm our support and request for the return of the Schneerson collection of sacred texts from the Russian State Library and the Russian State Military Archive to its rightful owners, Agudas Chasidei Chabad of United States ("Chabad").

On May 31, 1992, all one hundred members of the United States Senate appealed to then-President Boris Yeltsin to honor Russia's commitment to return the collection to Chabad. On February 24, 2005, all one hundred members of the United States Senate again signed an appeal for your assistance in returning the collection. Copies of these letters are attached hereto. Since 1992, eight volumes of the collection have been returned to Chabad. We hereby respectfully request your assistance in seeing the return of the entire collection.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

## REMEMBERING BERTA CACERES

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I want to call the Senate's attention to the fact that it has now been 1 year since the assassination of Berta Caceres, a renowned indigenous Honduran environmental activist who devoted her life—and ultimately lost her life—defending the land, water, and other natural resources of the Lenca people.

After an initial attempt by the Honduran police and even some high-ranking officials to falsely portray the murder as a crime of passion, which is a not uncommon ploy to cover up official complicity in such cases, eight men have been arrested, including one active-duty and two retired military officers.

Although Honduran officials have denied any government involvement in Ms. Caceres's murder and downplayed the arrest of Major Mariano Diaz who was promptly discharged from the army, there are reasons to be skeptical.

Diaz, a decorated special forces veteran, was appointed chief of army intelligence in 2015, and at the time of the murder he was reportedly on track