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Letter of Support
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As a Professor in the Department of Sociology at Brock University in Canada, where I teach various courses on animals and human society, I have been quite impressed with Austria's progressive legislation concerning animals. It is doubly shocking, then, that animal activists now have been subjected to police repression in Austria. It is my understanding that, at the time of writing, ten activists have been imprisoned without charge for over two weeks and that they have been further remanded on grounds that are far from transparent.

According to the Austrian Embassy in Canada, the activists are "suspected of being involved" in criminal actions involving property damage. If evidence exists that crimes have been committed, that evidence should be produced, charges laid and the accused should be allowed the opportunity to refute those charges in court. If there is no evidence of criminal activity, the activists should be released and receive appropriate compensation. Up to now, police and government officials simply have claimed that the activists belong to some nebulous "criminal organization" but have produced no proof that this is true. Statements from Austria's Green Party, Social-Democratic Party and from Amnesty International suggest that Section 278a of Austria's Criminal Code has been misused in this case.

These actions represent serious violations of civil rights. I am deeply concerned about the misuse of police authority and the safety of the prisoners, several of who have been on a hunger strike and whose health is now seriously endangered. I urge the Austrian authorities to resolve these matters immediately.

Austria's animal protectionist initiatives should be a matter of national pride and those activists who have worked to implement them should be regarded as national heroes, not subject to repression.

Sincerely,

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