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Honourable Otto Ditz
Austrian Ambassador to Canada
Austrian Foreign Mission
445 Wilbrod Street
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

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Dear Mr. Ambassador:

I am an instructor in Sociology at Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. I am also the author of a number of influential articles in animal ethics. Recently, I have learned of the arrest of a number of animal rights activists in Austria, including Dr. Martin Balluch, and I am appalled by the circumstances.

It seems to me from the evidence available that ironically, this arrest of the 10 activists is itself criminal:

1. The activists were arrested without evidence specifically linked to any criminal actions on their parts.
2. They are being held in prison, again without evidence, in what appears to be a "fishing expedition" for evidence while the activists languish in prison.
3. Every indignity these arrestees suffer in prison is a criminal insult as a result.

There has been loose talk of illegal property damage but no evidence has been produced, and no opportunity to counter such claims in court since specific charges to that effect have not even been laid.

These seem to be the hard facts. However, there are intangible considerations too. This brutality against activists is reminiscent of the Nazi era of Austria's history, in which political dissidents could be arrested on the slightest suspicion and be deprived of all remedies of justice. Certainly, this case will recall such repression in the minds of foreign observers such as myself. Believe me, I do not use this provocative and overused comparison lightly. The Austrian government is bringing itself into serious disrepute through its actions in this case, and that smearing of its name only gets worse with each additional day of incarceration of these individuals. Elected officials may yet pay the political price for their complicity in this travesty.

And what individuals these prisoners are! Dr. Balluch and his colleagues have earned my unstinting admiration for the huge legal strides that they have won for animals in Austria, such as banning experiments on great apes, eliminating cruel battery cages, and also ending the suffering on fur farms, among other victories. I speculate as to whether this is some form of crude but brutal political backlash against these successes.

Animal rights activists should not be subjected to human rights abuses, any more than any other human being. Rather, it should be recognized that animal rights activists are staunch defenders of humans rights along with the rights of other sentient beings.

My outrage at this injustice will only be quelled, along with the bristling of observers worldwide, by the immediate and unconditional release of these prisoners if there is no specific evidence of serious criminal wrongdoing on their part. The accusation that they run a large criminal organization seems to be a ludicrous paranoid fantasy on the part of the authorities, which would be laughable if it were not now being taken so seriously by the powers that be.

Austria is being watched by the world.

I plead for your speedy and assertive intervention. Dr. Balluch's dangerously extended hunger strike even more adds to the urgency of this case. A former colleague of his, Barry Horne, perished from a hunger strike in prison since he believed he was unfairly arrested for being an animal rights activist. While I recognize the need for fostering a positive relationship between Austria and Canada, human rights abuses merit swift and sure responses. So-called free and democratic countries such as Austria only remain that way through practical commitment and vigilance.

Thank you for your kind consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

David Sztybel, Ph.D.