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USSR

Committee for State Security  
at the Council of Ministers of the USSR

December [25], 1962

#3265-C, City of Moscow

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TO THE GENERAL DEPARTMENT, CC CPSU

CC CPSU

In 1955, the Committee for State Security, with the knowledge and consent of pertinent authorities and in coordination with the Prosecutor's Office of the USSR, issued Instruction #108cc with the procedures to be followed by all KGB bodies when processing citizen's inquiries about persons who were ordered shot by non-judicial authorities (former Board of the OGPU, OGPU-NKVD-UNKVD *troikas* [i.e., "tribunals of three"], NKVD Commission of the USSR and Prosecutor of the USSR). In accordance with these procedures, KGB bodies inform the convict's families that they were sentenced to 10 years in the labor camps and died there; if need be, when dealing with lawsuits concerning property and other claims, the death of a convict is placed on record at the registry office and the applicant is issued a certificate with the date of death kept within 10 years since the date of arrest, and with a fictitious cause of death.

The institution of these procedures in 1955 was justified by the fact that during mass repressions a large number of people were groundlessly convicted, so advising of what actually happened to these victims of repressions would have a negative effect on the status of their families. In addition, it was assumed at the time that telling the families of the shot victims the truth could be used by separate hostile elements to the detriment of the Soviet state.

The existing procedures of supplying fictitious information mainly apply to Soviet citizens who have suffered for no fault of their own, who were shot on orders of non-judicial authorities during the period of mass repressions.

As a result of re-examining criminal cases dating from 1954-61, about half the total number of those sentenced to death by shooting, using non-judicial

proceedings, have been rehabilitated. In most such cases their relatives have been advised of a fictitious cause of death, allegedly in jail/camp.

After the work accomplished by the Central Committee of the CPSU to expose the unlawful acts committed during the personality cult period, we believe it necessary to rescind the existing procedures of processing citizens' inquiries about their relatives.

Advising citizens of fictitious dates and causes of death of their close and dear ones place the state security bodies in a false position, especially when making public knowledge the dates of death of people previously held in esteem by the party and state. Besides, registration of deaths of persons whose execution was ordered by non-judicial authorities, while putting on record fictitious terms in jail/camp, places their families on unequal terms with those of persons sentenced to death by a court of law when determining pension terms.

The Soviet people are informed about mass violations of socialist justice, and the reasons behind the institution in 1955 of the procedures of notification of the victims' next of kin of what happened to the victims of repressions are no longer valid.

In view of everything stated above, we believe it expedient, in cases of executions ordered by non-judicial authorities, to orally notify the victims' next of kin of the actual cause of death and put on record the date of execution as the date of death, without specifying the cause of death... as practiced by the Military Board of the Supreme Court of the USSR and military tribunals with regard to persons sentenced to death by shooting.

This implies that the said procedures will not apply to persons placed on record using the previous, currently effective procedures of processing such inquiries.

Notifying the victim's next of kin of the true cause of death will enable the next of kin entitled to the loss of breadwinner pension to duly apply for this pension on preferential terms as the next of kin of a person who died of an employment injury or was killed in the line of duty.

It should be noted that the numbers of inquiries about persons executed by non-judicial authorities have been decreasing with each passing year (56,225 in 1959 compared to 8,018 registered during 8 months of 1962).

We believe it expedient not to alter the procedures — instituted by a resolution of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, of December 5, 1959 (Protocol [Minutes] #37) — of notification of the dates of death of persons sentenced to death by shooting proceeding from the circumstances of each such case, but not earlier than the actual date of execution and not later than 10 years from the date of arrest.

This proposal has been coordinated with the Prosecutor's Office of the USSR and the Supreme Court of the USSR.

Please advice.

(Signed)

V. Semichastny, Chairman of the Committee for State Security