Dr. Andrei Sakharov was a Soviet nuclear physicist, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975 for his efforts to promote peaceful coexistence and human rights. Instrumental in the development of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, he came to have grave concerns about the implications of thermonuclear weapons for humanity. Sakharov’s warnings about nuclear proliferation and atmospheric testing helped persuade the Soviet Union to sign the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963.

Sakharov co-founded the Moscow Human Rights Committee in 1970 and became an unrelenting advocate for civil liberties in his country. He put forth the concept of human rights as essential for international security. His sustained struggle for human rights led to a government campaign to discredit and persecute him. In 1975, Sakharov was prohibited from traveling to accept the Peace Prize. His wife, Elena Bonner, delivered his Nobel Lecture on his behalf.

In January 1980, Sakharov was sent arbitrarily into internal exile, where he went on several hunger strikes. Released by Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1986, Sakharov was elected to the Soviet Parliament and became a driving force for democratic reforms. Sakharov, described by the 1975 Peace Prize Committee as “the spokesman for the conscience of mankind”, died on December 14, 1989.

“…like faint glimmers in the dark, we have emerged for a moment from the nothingness of dark unconsciousness into material existence. We must make good the demands of reason and create a life worthy of ourselves.”

Image courtesy of the Estate of Yousuf Karsh, from an original photograph by Yousuf Karsh.