



Association
of Canadian
Archivists

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His Excellency Dr. László Pordány
Ambassador of the Republic of Hungary
299 Waverley Street
Ottawa, ON K2P 0V9

February 24, 2011

Dear Dr. Pordány:

I am writing you on behalf of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) to express our deep concern with the Hungarian government's decision to introduce legislation that would permit the removal and destruction of Hungarian communist secret police, interior ministry, and state security files currently held at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security in Budapest.

Established in 1975, the ACA is a national professional organization that represents English-speaking archivists in Canada. Archivists have a professional obligation to preserve authentic and reliable records for evidentiary and historical purposes. As archivists, we strongly believe that archives are the foundation of democracy, social justice, and social memory.

We reject the notion that a democratic state cannot "preserve the immoral documents of an immoral regime". On the contrary, records that provide evidence of injustices hold accountable those responsible for abuses of trust and power. Archival records provide evidence documenting the actions of public leaders and protecting the rights of all citizens. As Canadian archivist Terry Cook states, archival records have allowed "citizens to seek justice in righting past wrongs, from aboriginal displacements to war crimes, from medical neglect to ethnic discrimination." Removing documents from the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security because they are deemed to have been created by "immoral" authorities would only weaken Hungarians' ability to hold those officials accountable and would thus undermine a fundamental pillar of democracy.

Further, we strongly believe that de-accessioning these irreplaceable documents would impoverish Hungary's archival heritage. It would undermine our ability to know and understand an important aspect Hungary's past. Preserving the Hungarian communist secret police, interior ministry, and state security files supports an accurate account of the past and ensures that collective amnesia does not prevail.

The Association of Canadian Archivists believes that the Hungarian communist secret police, interior ministry, and state security files currently held at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security have enduring value as reliable memories of the past. We urge the government of Hungary to take all steps consistent with professional archival practice to preserve these unique and important records. Anything less is an abdication of your government's responsibility to uphold democratic values and to preserve and to protect Hungary's collective memory.

Yours Sincerely,

Loryl MacDonald, President
Association of Canadian Archivists