



## Laszlo Hamos

April 16, 2019

The Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF) announces with profound sadness that László Hámos passed away on April 16 in New York, after a long and bravely borne illness.

László Hámos was co-founder in 1976 of the Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, which in 1984 became the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation. He remained at the helm of HHRF for the past 43 years. His vision and commitment sustained a movement, and fundamentally shaped the community of HHRF co-workers and supporters throughout the world.

László was born in 1951 in Paris to Hungarian parents (his father was born in Slovakia, his mother in Romania) and raised in a New Jersey suburb of New York. A graduate of the Mount Hermon School (Massachusetts), he studied international relations at the University of Pennsylvania. After working at the law firm of Cravath, Swaine & Moore, he started his own legal research and litigation support services company in Manhattan, before giving up the legal career to work full-time at HHRF.

In his youth, László was formed by the Hungarian-American organizations in Manhattan's Yorkville neighborhood – the scouts, the Hungarian Reformed Church, the Hungarian House. Proud of his Hungarian heritage, László had an equally strong sense of American identity. In the 1970's, U.S. foreign policy singled out Romania, alone among Communist East bloc adversaries, as a "Most Favored Nation". As László often told the story, it was as a U.S. citizen that he found this intolerable: the U.S. government ("Our government!") chose to overlook the Ceausescu regime's human rights violations, including a systematic campaign of forced assimilation against the Hungarian minority. On May 8, 1976, he and a group of fellow Hungarian-Americans decided to exercise their civil rights: they organized a demonstration at the Romanian consulate in New York. The Committee (later Hungarian Human Rights Foundation) was born.

Initially an ad-hoc group of young volunteers, HHRF changed the way Hungarian-American organizations operated. Instead of looking inward or backward, HHRF embraced the unique power of "hyphenated Americans" and their potential, as ordinary voters, to influence their elected Congressmen and other decision-makers. Uniquely among Hungarian-American groups at the time, HHRF used the concept of human rights

as the morally and legally acceptable “handle” to get U.S. policymakers at international forums to raise the issue of rights violations against Hungarian minorities. To document these violations, HHRF gathered, translated and published first-hand information provided by courageous underground activists in Slovakia and Romania (at a time when the web did not exist, the fax was a novelty, and Eastern bloc countries banned copy machines). In the mid 1980s, Baron Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza – who was partly of Transylvanian-Hungarian origin – was duly impressed by László’s work and became HHRF’s major benefactor and board member until his death.

László was a natural leader: he inspired co-workers by his clear thinking, problem-solving approach, and heartfelt desire to help those in need, often at the expense of his own well-being. In documentation, his sole goal – from which he never gave an inch – was to produce top-quality and airtight text. The high standards paid off. Under László’s leadership, HHRF developed into a trusted clearinghouse of well-researched, reliable information (“Our only asset is our reputation!”), and over the years built up a network of bipartisan U.S. allies in Congress and State Department willing to use their offices to speak up on behalf of Hungarian minorities, themselves “voiceless” behind the Iron Curtain.

László wrote and edited several volumes, position papers and scholarly articles on human rights, in addition to presenting more than 1,000 pages of written testimony at 27 hearings before various Congressional committees. He lectured at Cornell, Princeton, Yale and Columbia Universities and served as a consultant to the news media, other international human rights monitoring organizations, as well as U.S. and international governmental bodies.

Since 1976, László met with six U.S. presidents. He participated in three 1994 discussions with President Clinton and Vice President Gore regarding NATO enlargement. In March 1990, he arranged and participated in the Oval Office meeting between President George H. W. Bush, cabinet members and Rev. László Tóké, the Hungarian Protestant minister from Romania whose resistance sparked the 1989 revolution. Over the years, László held several hundred personal meetings with Members of Congress, White House and State Department officials organized for Hungarian community leaders from East Central Europe after the fall of Communism.

László’s personal example directly inspired a new generation of leadership in the larger Hungarian-American community. Since 1984, HHRF hosted 73 interns in New York and Washington from around the world. Many of them would continue professional activities related to human rights. None would forget their late-night conversations with László, the stories he told, the habits he kept, or his kindness.

In 1991, HHRF was a co-founder of the Hungarian American Coalition, and László continuously served as Board and Executive Committee member since that time. In 1996, he was elected Director of the Hungarian Reformed Federation of America (HRFA). In his

capacity as Chairman beginning in 2008, he successfully led the Federation's merger with GBU Financial Life in 2011. Until Fall 2013, László was Chairman of HRFA's successor organization, the Kossuth Foundation. He also served as President of the 64-year-old American Hungarian Library and Historical Society in New York.

László played a decisive role in preserving and developing two emblematic buildings belonging to the Hungarian American community: the Hungarian House of New York, and the Kossuth House in Washington, DC. He developed new initiatives to promote cultural identity among the 1.5 million Americans of Hungarian ancestry, notably the 2012 launch of ReConnect Hungary Birthright Program under the patronage of former New York State Governor George E. Pataki.

László also won respect throughout the world-wide Hungarian Diaspora. László represented Hungarians in the West at meetings of the Hungarian Standing Conference (MÁÉRT) and the Carpathian Basin Hungarian Parliamentarians' Forum (KMKF) in Budapest. Between 1998-2002, he served in a pro bono capacity as Foreign Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister of Hungary. Awards recognizing his and HHRF's achievements include: the "For Minorities Award" (Kisebbségékért Díj) in 1996; the "Middle Cross of the Hungarian Republic" (Magyar Köztársasági Érdemrend Középkeresztje) in 2001; the American Hungarian Foundation's Abraham Lincoln Award in 2007; and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Arany János Medal, bestowed in 2011. László Hámos is survived by his wife, Zsuzsa Erdélyi Hámos, daughter Júlia and son Dániel; parents Ottó and Margit Hámos, brother Árpád, and numerous family members in the U.S., Europe and Asia.

He is also mourned by HHRF Board Members Emese Latkóczy, Zsolt Szekeres and Péter Józsa, and by many other co-workers and associates who benefited over the decades from his friendship, character and vision.

Visitation will be Saturday, April 20 between 10 am and noon at the Barrett Funeral Home (148 Dean Drive, Tenafly, NJ 07670. [www.barrettfuneralhome.net](http://www.barrettfuneralhome.net)). Interment will follow at 1 pm in Brookside Cemetery (425 Engle Street, Englewood, NJ 07631.

<https://www.brooksidecemetery.net/>). A memorial gathering will be held at the Hungarian House in New York at a later date.

The Hungarian Prime Minister's Office, recognizing the invaluable contributions of László Hámos to the Hungarian nation, will provide full funeral honors.

# Cemetery

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## Brookside Cemetery

425 Engle St

Englewood, NJ, 07631

# Events

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**APR 20** **Visitation** 10:00AM - 12:00PM

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Barrett Funeral Home

148 Dean Dr, Tenafly, NJ, US, 07670

**APR 20** **Service** 12:00PM

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Barrett Funeral Home

148 Dean Dr, Tenafly, NJ, US, 07670

# Comments

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“ I met László --when he was still a teenager in secondary school-- through his [older] brother Árpád who was my best friend during our undergraduate education decades ago in northern New Jersey. Afterwards, László and I coincided at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where he was an undergraduate student and I spent a couple of post-baccalaureate years; he would regularly invite me to a meal at his apartment on campus. Thereafter we have kept in touch here in New Jersey and I have visited the Hámos home several times for family celebrations to which I was kindly invited. Our respective families, indeed, share an additional commonality as we were each victims of communist dictatorships, the Hámos in Hungary, the Alums in Cuba. And László and I have also shared our interest in activism vis-à-vis freedom and liberty for everybody, everywhere, all the time. My deep condolence to his dear wife, children, parents, and all other kinsmen, and particularly Árpád, my pal of over half-a-century, who routinely idolized with immense pride his kid sibling László. Prof. Roland Armando Alum, West New York, N.J. [ralum@pitt.edu]

Prof. Roland Armando Alum - May 06 at 08:48 PM

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“ Őszinte részvétem az egész családnak!  
Mély részvéttel,  
Ibolya

Ibolya - April 20 at 12:40 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Tribute Wall



Pamela Billig - April 19 at 07:38 PM

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“ Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Laszlo Hamos.



April 19 at 01:11 PM

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“ Strength & Solace Spray was purchased for the family of Laszlo Hamos.



April 19 at 12:03 PM

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“ From the minute we arrived to the US in 1964, the Hamos family, Otto Bacsi (uncle), Margit Neni (aunt), Laszlo and his older brother Arpad became a part of our lives as we were cousins. They helped us settle in this country. We spent together many sunny days at the Jersey shore, in family gatherings at the Hamos garden, at visits when we were taught more about our heritage and where we were all told stories about family members we had never met because they lived behind the iron curtain and we were not allowed to visit them; they told us of the beauty of old country and the escape of our families during the war. When my Dad, grof Tisza Lajos Kalman, passed away in 1964, Otto Bacsi became the family patriarch. Laszlo, in later years was too busy to spend much time with us, but we always knew where he was and what he was doing. His personal friendship with the Hungarian Prime Minister, his fight for human rights and a myriad of other interests made his family proud and did much good. He will be missed. Sweet dreams Laszlo -- till we meet again.  
Helen (Ilona) Tisza Nitsch

**Helen (Ilona) Tisza Nitsch** - April 18 at 12:38 PM

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“ Charles Guerrero and Ferina Duenas purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Laszlo Hamos.



**Charles Guerrero and Ferina Duenas** - April 18 at 10:38 AM

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“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Laszlo Hamos.



April 18 at 08:17 AM

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“ Laszlo, my long ago friend, you shall be missed, not just for what you accomplished in this life, which is huge, but for your light and kindness. One of my favorite memories of you is actually from Easter when, every year, you and your brother Arpad, would come over our house and chase us all over the place with perfumed water, a long ago tradition that symbolizes the watering of spring flowers so they will not wilt! My sisters and I would shriek and run away, but then we'd relent, and give you Easter eggs and refreshment. It was always quite an event and a lot of fun! ...I sensed your presence recently and thank you for visiting to say goodbye. Sending love and hugs,  
Lily Mazurek



Lily - April 18 at 12:02 AM

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“ The Tisza Family purchased the Rainbow Of Remembrance Spray for the family of Laszlo Hamos.



The Tisza Family - April 17 at 04:22 PM