

# Memorial will be a tribute to human rights victims

OTTAWA - When Hungarian-Canadians gathered here last December to protest and mourn the murder of thousands of ethnic Hungarians in Timisoara, Romania, they deliberately chose a small, snow-covered construction site for their vigil.

A cross and wreath were left behind and remained there for weeks to remind passerby on Elgin Street, one of Ottawa's fashionable restaurant districts, of the slaughter that had taken place half a world away.

This fall, when work at the site is complete, several leading human rights activists from around the world - including Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and Oscar Arias, former Costa Rican president and 1987 Nobel Prize winner - will be there to dedicate the Canadian Tribute to Human Rights. The monument is being described as the world's first dedicated to human rights.

Inscribed over the archway at one end of the structure, designed by Montreal artist Melvin Charney, will be the first sentence of Article One of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

Visitors will walk through the archway into a small semi-enclosed area Charney calls a "tribunal" - meant to symbolize houses of government - and then along a path among large human-like forms with outstretched arms. Some of

the figures will be holding plaques bearing the words "dignity," "equality" and "rights."

The tribute, overseen by a board of volunteers and three staff members working out of the trailer they share with the construction crew, has been in the works for more than six years. It grew out of a bid by Polish-Canadians in Ottawa to have city council rename a street after the Solidarity labor movement.

When their request was turned down, the idea of a monument took hold and the theme was broadened to human rights across the world.

### UNIVERSAL RIGHTS

"The Solidarity movement in fact was fighting for all rights everywhere," says Hania Fedorowicz, the project's president. "So the universality of rights became the central idea."

At last count, about \$588,000 toward the project's \$866,000 budget had been contributed by churches, labor groups, ethnic associations, companies, municipalities and others since fundraising began in 1983.

That year was also the 35th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, a document ac-

tivists say marked the first time world leaders attempted to define basic individual rights in international law.

From its opening sentence, the declaration goes on to assert rights in 30 subsequent sections. They range from protections - from torture, slavery and arbitrary treatment before the law, for instance, - to more "positive" rights such as the right to participate in government, entitlement to rest and leisure and freedom of expression.

"It's the seminal document," says Amnesty International's Rob Robertson. "It's really viewed by everyone in the human rights field as the most important event that has occurred in human rights."

The declaration has given activists around the world a set of broadly agreed-upon standards to refer to in working for change, says Robertson, Amnesty's Canadian co-ordinator for Western Europe.



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