

# Local Amnesty group hears from their 'adopted prisoner'

By JANET DUVAL

Special to The Independent/Free Press

After months of silence, the Halton Hills Amnesty International Group has received several letters at once from Cuba. Their adopted prisoner of conscience, Israel Gonzalez Leyva, is serving a 10-year sentence there for peacefully opposing the policies of Communist president Fidel Castro.

The young engineer is in poor health, in a country where everyone is suffering the effects of a severe economic crisis.

"My brother would have died from hunger in the prison" writes his sister Beatriz, who lives nearby

in Holguin. She takes him food "available only with the payment of dollars or foreign currency" on the black market.

Israel, she says, is very thin and suffering with hemorrhoids. "If possible, could you send aspirins and painkillers" she asks. "Also, please include some soap, as this is not available locally."

Local Amnesty group members had been concerned for both Israel and his sister as months passed with no word, and as they learned of the deepening crisis in Cuba. Optical neuritis, a disease caused by malnutrition, has swept through that country, now that the Soviets have withdrawn all support and the

American trade embargo continues. Basic necessities are in short supply, and there are regular shortages of power and water.

The letter from Beatriz arrived written on cheap newsprint, enclosed in a handmade envelope.

Group members are sending supplies in several small packages, hoping some will reach Beatriz safely, and in time for her next visit with her brother on May 11. She is only allowed to see him every two or three months.

Her letters, written in Spanish, were translated here by group supporter Elizabeth Carmichael. Beatriz says she is studying "British English" as her brother is

also doing in prison.

Amnesty members work for Israel's release by inundating government ministers and prison officials with letters they write at their monthly meetings. Eventually, they hope, the sheer pressure of relentless mail from foreigners will persuade leaders to release this prisoner who seems to have such popular support.

The group regularly sends cards to Israel himself, and not just to boost his spirits.

"The authorities are fully aware that he receives, and answers, letters from friends in Canada" says Beatriz, "even though these have to be taken out illegally from jail to

avoid confiscation of the same."

After four years of imprisonment on two separate charges, Israel, she says, is still "convinced in the cause he defends and in the errors made by this system of government and the one-party country."

"Each letter received by my brother and myself shows us that not everything is lost and not all the world turns its back on just causes."

The local Amnesty group always appreciates help from anyone able to write a letter, translate Spanish, or attend its fundraising coffee houses, the next one to take place April 16.

For information please call Linn Kingston at 873-3383.

## Former police chief to be honored

Former Halton Regional police chief James Harding will be honored at a retirement dinner Friday, April 8.

"The function will be an enjoyable and interesting evening," promised Halton police spokesman Sgt. Joe Martin.

"In addition to a dance, the Halton Regional Police Chorus and our Pipes and Drums will be

entertaining."

The tribute will be held at Le Dome, 1173 North Service Rd., in Oakville. Presentations will take



JAMES HARDING

place at 6 p.m. followed by dinner.

"Many dignitaries from throughout the province will be attending and speaking of the notable accomplishments and lengthy career of (former) Chief Harding," said Sgt. Martin.

The general public is invited. For tickets, which cost \$35 call 825-4777, ext. 5051 or 5042.

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