

# MINNESOTA LAWYERS INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 4

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

JUNE/JULY 1987

## RUTA RELEASED FROM ROMANIAN PRISON

by Christine Solso

On June 6, 1987, Mr. Ioan Constantin Ruta was released from Jilava Prison in Bucharest, Romania, where he has been held since February 27, 1986. Late in the afternoon of June 6th, a car dropped Mr. Ruta off in front of the home of his relatives. The relatives were completely surprised by his sudden appearance since the government had not given them any indication that his release was forthcoming. Before Mr. Ruta was freed, prison officials informed him that Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu had granted him "presidential amnesty."

Mr. Ruta's case came to the attention of the Committee in March, 1986. Mr. Ruta had mysteriously disappeared shortly after his wife, Rodica Ruta, had been granted political asylum by the United States government. Mr. Ruta's family did not know where or why he had been detained until June, 1986, when the Romanian government brought criminal charges against him for allegedly accepting bribes from employees of the factory which he managed. Mr. Ruta's trial began in July, 1986 and Committee members Christine Solso and Sam Heins observed portions of these proceedings in October, 1986. The Committee was concerned that the charges against Mr.

Ruta were politically motivated. Mr. Ruta was convicted on the bribery charges in November, 1986 and was sentenced to seven years in prison.

Since his detention, Mr. Ruta's health has deteriorated dramatically. He suffered a severe heart attack, contracted chronic hepatitis and lost approximately 60 lbs. Now that Mr. Ruta is out of prison, his family is hopeful that he will be able to receive proper medical treatment.

At press time, the Committee has received word that the Romanian Government has granted Mr. Ruta a passport. The Committee has reason to believe that Mr. Ruta will be allowed to emigrate to the United States in the next few days in order to join his wife, Rodica, and daughter, Alina, in White Bear Lake, Minnesota.

### IN THIS ISSUE

Human Rights Awards Dinner.....	2,3,4,5
Introduction of Mayor Fraser.....	4
Dr. Max Coleman's Remarks.....	5
Cubans Wait for Release.....	6
From the Director's Desk.....	7
Project Updates.....	7
Calendar of Events.....	8



Ioan Constantin Ruta

430 Marquette Avenue, Suite 402, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401, (612) 341-3302

A Minnesota Non-Profit Corporation with tax exempt status

## HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS DINNER '87

Two hundred seventy-five people attended this year's Human Rights Awards dinner honoring family groups for the detained and "disappeared" in Argentina, Guatemala and South Africa. At right, Sheldon Karlins (left) and his wife Rhoda visit with Dr. Max Coleman.



The 1987 Human Rights Awards Dinner took place in the Atrium of International Market Square.

The Reverend T. Simon Farisani of Venda, South Africa listened after giving a blessing at the dinner.



# HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS DINNER '87



Executive Director Barbara Frey spoke about the activities of the Minnesota Lawyers Committee during the past year.

Alina Ruta her mother Rodica Ruta (see story, page 1) were recognized at the dinner.



Nelida Navajas (speaking) and Maria Isabel de Mariani accepted the award for the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo while interpreter Mary McCann looked on.

Our thanks to Bill Cameron and David Wheaton for the photographs of the 1987 Human Rights Awards Dinner.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS DINNER '87



Judge Isabel Gomez accepted the award on behalf of the Guatemalan Mutual Support Group.



Jan Smaby (left) presented the human rights award to Argentines Nérida Navajas (center) and Maria Isabel de Mariani (right).



It is important in ceremonial events of this kind that both our special honored guests as well as all of you, who are contributing your time and money to a worthy cause, be appropriately welcomed. And there can be no more fitting citizen of our state to bestow that welcome than Minneapolis Mayor Don Fraser. But for Don Fraser and a handful of courageous men and women like him, the words "human rights" would have little or no recognized place in the dictionary of global coexistence.

Don Fraser was fighting for international human rights at a time when most of us couldn't have told you what the words meant. He has fought for human rights in the Congress, in the United Nations, and in the field.

As a founding member of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, Don can rightly take a large share of the credit for the energy and impetus that has led to the astonishing growth of this still-young organization.

Perhaps the nicest thing I could say about Don Fraser is that he is the kind of person who could be counted on, if conditions in our country were as dangerous and desperate as they are in other parts of the world, to show the kind of moral leadership and raw courage that our award recipients tonight from South Africa, Argentina and Guatemala have displayed.

And the leadership of Don Fraser and people like him has provided a light for oppressed people everywhere, so that they can know that someone out there is listening -- that someone cares -- that someone will get their message to the world. It is a great privilege indeed to introduce to you a man we all think of as a good friend, Don Fraser.

- Introduction by Wood Foster  
June 4, 1987

## HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS DINNER '87

institutionalized violence. In the process, they become dehumanized and a danger to all mankind.

During my short stay in your beautiful city, I have frequently been asked as to what importance I attach to this award. Its importance just cannot be overemphasized. This award carries with it the clear and unmistakable message to the government of South Africa that the international community regards its policies as an abomination, a heresy, and an affront to human dignity. It says that the world is watching what the South African government is doing to its people.

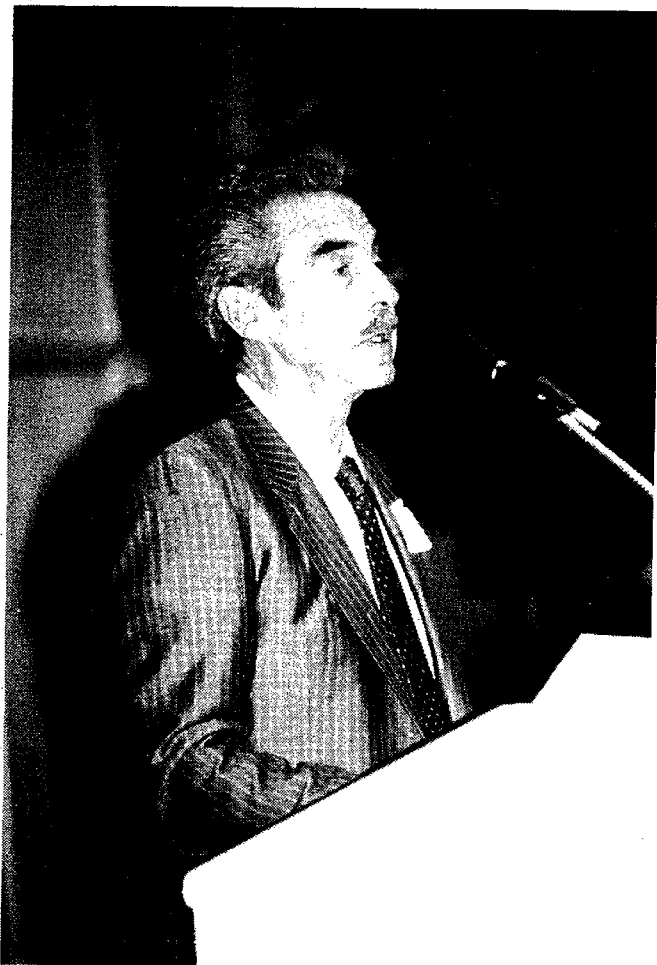
This award also has a message for the suffering people of South Africa. It says that the international community, represented in this instance by the Minnesota Lawyers Committee, supports their struggle for a truly democratic South Africa.

And, finally, there is a message of encouragement to the Detainees' Parents Support Committee to continue its work in the context of that struggle. It is the kind of support we shall need in the days ahead to stand up to the authorities that refuse to meet with us to discuss detainee issues--refuse even to recognize our existence. Thus, the international recognition from a body like yours is doubly important, in that it may serve to confer a measure of protection on us during the struggle that lies ahead.

We never fail to marvel how people from all parts of the world seem to have such an intense interest and concern about what is happening thousands of miles away down at the end of Africa. We must suppose that the incorporation of racial discrimination into the laws of South Africa provides a focus for universal revulsion against this practice and its ugly consequences, and a realization that justice and peace in this world are indivisible. In the words of South Africa's major trade union federation, "An injury to one is an injury to all."

Nowhere is this concept better appreciated than right here in Minneapolis, where the concern with human rights is quite stunning. The Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee has been a revelation to me, and all concerned are to be congratulated on your pioneering work.

The Detainees' Parents Support Committee is honoured, indeed, to become a recipient of this wonderful award, which we accept with deep humility.



South African Max Coleman received the award on behalf of the Detainees' Parents Support Committee. What follows are his remarks at the dinner:

Before I arrived here in Minneapolis, I read everything I could lay my hands on about the Mutual Support Group of Guatemala and their struggle. Since I have been here, I have listened with avid interest to the Grandmothers of the Disappeared from Argentina.

And I ask myself, how is it that in three such different parts of the world, so far from each other as Guatemala, Argentina and South Africa, one learns that the governments of these countries or their agents persecute their people by detention, banning, torture, abduction and assassination? What is it that they have in common that causes them to behave in this way? One comes inevitably to the conclusion that such governments do not rule with the consent of the people but with the connivance of a small, privileged minority, that the only way they can maintain themselves in power is by brute force and

## CUBANS WAIT IMPATIENTLY AS GOVERNMENT PLANS THEIR RELEASE

There are still some 3000 Mariel Cubans detained in jails and prisons around the country, including almost 100 in Minnesota. While the Cubans' frustrations and feelings of hopelessness increase, the federal government is very slowly taking steps to address their situation. First, the INS has established a panel to review the Cubans' cases, and second, the federal government has approved funding to contract with halfway houses for the provision of "special placement programs" for the Cubans.

Under the review plan approved by INS Commissioner, Alan C. Nelson, a panel composed of two immigration officials will examine the Cubans' records, and recommend that they either be released to a halfway house, remain in detention, or be interviewed by the panel. According to Panel Director, Thomas Curi, they will begin reviewing cases this month at the facilities where most Mariel Cubans are detained--the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary in Georgia, the Oakdale Detention Center in Louisiana, and the Krome Detention Center in Florida. Curi expects they will not begin reviewing cases of Cubans detained in Minnesota correctional facilities until late Summer or early Fall.

Curi said the following factors would be considered in the review process: the Cuban's criminal record, psychological history, completion of educational or vocational training, attitude, and presence of family in the United States or other support in the community. Based on these factors, the panel will decide whether each Cuban is suitable for release to a halfway house program.

The Lawyers Committee recommended in a report issued last fall, that the INS establish individualized hearings to review the status of the Mariel Cubans. The new INS plan differs significantly from the process suggested by the

Lawyers Committee. The Lawyers Committee proposed a larger panel that would include a representative of the Cuban community, and suggested that guidelines be established to reduce subjectivity in the decision-making process. The INS has not released its guidelines, but it is clear that the two panel members have been given very broad discretion in conducting these reviews. Also, the Lawyers Committee recommended that everyone be entitled to a personal interview, not just a select few, and that those who are not approved for release be entitled to a second review within six months. Curi stated that subsequent reviews may be granted, but only after the INS has reviewed all the cases once.

The second major development regarding the Cubans is that the Community Relations Service, which is coordinating the release of Cubans to halfway houses, has received funding and can now approve three more halfway house programs. It is not clear, however, when any facilities will receive final approval or where they will be located. Delays in approving more halfway houses have been a major obstacle in attempts to end the indefinite detention of the Cubans.

Despite these small steps in the right direction, Mariel Cubans incarcerated locally are becoming increasingly frustrated as the days go by. Fourteen Cuban detainees in Stillwater have already been approved for release, and have been waiting for halfway house spaces to become available since October 6, 1986. To express their anger at their continuing detention, a few Cubans at Stillwater recently began a hunger strike. Also, in a letter sent to the INS District Director, Gerald Coyle on May 20, the Cubans stated that the prospect of reviews or halfway house programs seems far away, since no one has been released in over a year. They asked that there be no more "stories and empty promises" but simply freedom.

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

The visits to Minnesota of the Grandmothers from Argentina and Dr. Max Coleman from South Africa will long be remembered. As family members, they touched us with their eloquent descriptions of painful personal experiences. As representatives of family human rights groups, they impressed upon us the need to work together locally and internationally to obtain justice for past human rights violations and to prevent future ones.

I was lucky to have the chance to spend some free time with the visitors in between their various speaking engagements. These quieter moments yielded interesting stories.

One day over lunch, the two Grandmothers described for us the remarkable community of women they have organized to work on locating their grandchildren kidnapped by the military government. The women work together in a house which is packed with activity and conversation. They have eight or nine full-time volunteers -- all grandmothers -- and up to 400 who volunteer their services part-time. Each woman contributes what she can to the community: one cooks lunch for the group, some serve as secretaries, others as investigators who follow the tips called or mailed in by thousands of citizens.

During the conversation, the Grandmothers proudly told us about their most recent acquisition, the "grandmother-mobile", a chauffeured taxi hired out to transport Grandmothers on their investigative errands.



Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo President Maria Isabel de Mariani (left) and member Nelida Navajas (right).

Maria Isabel de Mariani also talked about the problems that have come with aging. Because the Grandmothers have not taken very good care of their own personal health over the past ten years, they now are beginning to have serious physical problems. The Grandmothers have therefore arranged for a doctor to visit their office once a week to do physical check-ups on the volunteers.

These anecdotes highlight what, for me, is the most endearing quality about the Grandmothers -- their personal affection for one other. This community of women, linked by similar personal tragedy, has come to fill a void left intrusive government action. The Grandmothers are, indeed, a family.

*Barbara A. Frey*

## PROJECT UPDATES

Committee studies human rights in Tunisia: Committee members John Borman and Inger Tangborn co-authored an article entitled, "Could Tunisia Be the Next Iran?". Borman, an attorney with Robins, Zelle, Larson & Kaplan, and Tangborn, a University of Minnesota law student have been investigating a series of recent detentions in Tunisia, including leaders and members of human rights groups, opposition parties, trade unions, religious movements.

Hennepin County Bar Foundation grants \$1,800 for asylum documentation file: The Minnesota Lawyers Committee received a generous grant from the HCBF to establish a country by country documentation file for its Pro Bono Asylum Project. Summer intern, Elizabeth Shaver, will be in charge of collecting background information on the human rights situations in several key countries for use by attorneys representing political asylum applicants.

Committee investigates religious tolerance in Albania: The Committee is collecting background materials for a study on tolerance of religion in the Socialist country of Albania. Albania is the only country in the world with a constitution that expressly forbids the practice of religion. Attorney Susan Richard Nelson is heading up the research on Albania.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS is a publication of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, a non-profit organization committed to promoting human rights and investigating human rights violations in the United States and abroad.

The Minnesota Lawyers Committee advocates against individual human rights abuses, researches and investigates human rights conditions in other countries, encourages the adoption of international human rights standards by all countries, and educates the membership, the Bar, political leaders and the public about human rights issues.

Officers:

Robert P. Sands	President
James E. Dorsey	Vice President
Jean M. Boler	Secretary
James V. Roth	Treasurer
David Weissbrodt	Legal Counsel

Newsletter Committee:

Donna-Marie Boulay  
Deborah Kleinman McNeil  
Raymond C. Meyer

Staff:

Barbara A. Frey	Executive Director
Marie Bibus	Staff Attorney
Paul W. Fraser	Administrative Asst.
Elizabeth Shaver	Staff Intern

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Friday, July 10: Jean Jachman, facilitator of Refugee Advocacy Coalition, will speak on "Refugees in Thailand" at 12:15 p.m. at Hvass, Weisman & King, Suite 2100, 100 South Fifth Street, Minneapolis. Bring a bag lunch.

Wednesday, July 15: Members of the Minnesota Lawyers Committee's delegation to Guatemala, Judge Isabel Gomez, Louis Smith, Thomas Barrett and Michael Persellin, will speak about their observations at 12:15 p.m. at Popham, Haik, Schnobrich & Kaufman, 3300 Piper Jaffray Tower, Minneapolis. Bring a bag lunch.

---

**MINNESOTA LAWYERS  
INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**

---

430 Marquette Avenue, Suite 402, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 3637  
Minneapolis, MN

Richard Thomas  
1270 Lincoln Ave  
St. Paul, MN 55105