President of Amnesty stresses importance of rectifying human rights violations to York group

By MINTO ROY

"Due to efforts of Amnesty International, five prisoners of conscience are released per day" around the world, said the past president of the Canadian chapter and Toronto lawyer Michael Schelew.

Schelew along with Peter Benanson, the founder and president of Amnesty International, told a group in Bethune College on Monday that

the world-wide organization works to secure the release of political prisoners as well as prisoners of conscience, those people who are jailed for non-violent expressions of their

"If nothing at all is done to rectify human rights violations," Benanson said, "we as members will know that we have not done our duty as members of the human race." He added, "Violence of any kind brutal-izes the whole of society." Benanson said that Amnesty International chapters can be found in 43 countries, with the Canadian contingent containing 168 groups of 75,000 members.

As a non-profit organization, Benanson said that Amnesty International relies on their annual budget of two million dollars, made up of charitable donations, and rejects government subsidies because of its belief that other countries might charge that the group is influenced by governmental con-

Schelew said that the most effective technique used to plea for the case of the political prisoner is that of letter writing to the respective government in concern. "Many people are quite surprised at how much impact this letter writing technique can have," Schelew said. The letter should explain the human rights violation, as well as evidence to support the claim, Schelew added.

Another channel that Amnesty

utilizes is the media. "The papers are very important in printing what Amnesty has to say," Benanson said. "Publicity can be very influential on governments."

The recent issue concerning the Tamil refugees is a good example of media influence. "Amnesty stands firm in its belief that these refugees have a right to have their claims heard," Benanson said. The organization is currently looking into a claim by the Canadian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka who expressed concern that if these refugees are sent back, they will face torture, or perhaps even execution, Benanson added.

These Tamil refugees should not be extradited until this claim has been proven to be false. Benanson said. "It would be inhuman to send these people back to a country where it is unsure whether they will live or

Another controversial issue for discussion was the human rights violation in apartheid South Africa, where Benanson said that "no black citizen moves or opens their mouth without fear" of being persecuted. The turmoil in South Africa is "a scandal to all those who live in the Northern Hemisphere," Benanson said. "Sanctions must be imposed to a full extent if we are to have any influence in rectifying this dilemma" of apartheid, he added.

The informal session on Amnesty International was sponsored by the LaMarsh Research Program in conjunction with International Amnesty Week in Canada to celebrate the organization's 25 years of existence.

York is one of the few Ontario universities without an Amnesty campus group," Schelew said. "It would certainly be appropriate with our celebration if York formed a campus group and became a part of our long tradition."



LOUNGING GEESE: This flock of Canadian Geese relax after a hard day's work forming birthday greetings for Harry Arthurs in Stong Pond.

Student centre now major priority of CYSF

By LAURA LUSH

A motion recognizing the building of a York student centre as a major priority of the Council of York Student Federation (CYSF) was passed unanimously at an October 14 general meeting.

Although council had received support in principle of the affiliated member constituencies, CYSF President Gerard Blink said he initiated the motion because "it hadn't been acknowledged as of yet as an official motion by council.'

Blink said the vote was based on the motion itself that recognizes the need to make the construction of a student centre a top CYSF priority,

and not on the preface to the motion which included several clauses to justify the motion. "The speaker (Marshall Golden) advised that we should not vote on the preface," Blink said, "because when you announce a long motion, it can get complicated." All of the constituency members were asked to sign the motion.

"We are encouraging affiliate members to read the material on the student centre and make their own decision," Blink said. Currently, Blink and assistant in the student centre initiative, Rob Castle are visiting various constituencies to gain feedback on the centre.

"We're going to keep discussing (the student centre)," Blink said.

"Rob and I will be going to faculty councils, such as the Creative Arts Board and the Faculty of Education Students Association," in the near future. Blink also said they began pursuing the student central proposal with the college masters in the early fall. "We gave them the Phase Two report of the student centre (which contains the rationale for a student centre) for their perusal and comments.'

So far, Blink and Castle have met with Vanier, Bethune, Founders and Stong Colleges, and the Clubs Commission to discuss the proposed student centre. "We're putting the ball in their court," Blink said, "and asking for their feedback."

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