

# They 'adopt' 2 prisoners

By Jeff Juterbock  
staff writer

Some people hear about human rights atrocities committed on the other side of the world and sympathize with the victims, but think there is nothing they can do to help.

Two area residents, however, say there is something that local people can do to aid foreign prisoners.

Among those dedicated to safeguarding the human rights of others are Lou Mika of Plymouth, and Charlene Moore of Livonia. The pair are members of Amnesty International, a worldwide human rights organization which works on behalf of those who are persecuted and/or imprisoned for their religious or political beliefs, race, sex or ethnic origin.

"We work for human rights by writing letters to leaders of countries that are violating human rights. We try to get them to clean up their acts. We're assigned certain prisoners and we write letters on their behalf," said Moore, a freelance illustrator.

MIKA AND MOORE belong to the Ann Arbor Adoption Group #1 of Amnesty International (AI). The Ann Arbor chapter is one of six adoption groups in the state. Adoption groups assume a prisoner in another country and then write letters to the country's government in hopes of obtaining that person's release.

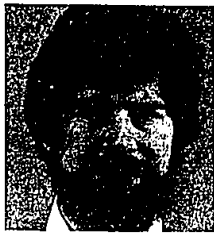
Group #1 has adopted two individuals: Tatyana Velikanova, a grandmother and a human rights worker who is in a Soviet labor camp, and a Turkish prisoner.

The group has petitioned Soviet premier Yuri Andropov to release her. Velikanova's crime was that she was helping Soviet dissidents' families. Dissidents in the Soviet Union are unable to work and would otherwise starve.

Velikanova was accused of what Mika called a "blanket charge" of "agitating against the state."

Some 300 people who attended a candlelight vigil last month on the lawn of the state capitol signed a petition in support of Velikanova. The petition will be sent to Soviet leaders.

"Our job is to fill up that file and make it irritating so that the Soviets may take action," Mika and Moore said.



Lou Mika



Charlene Moore

"We try to tell the leaders if the prisoner is being treated bad. The prisoner will eventually get better treatment, if there is a barrage of letters to the leader," Mika explained.

"THE LETTERS aren't released to the public, but they are kept in file usually by the governments. If enough are sent, the prisoner may be freed or at least, not tortured any longer."

In addition to adoption groups there are 15 urgent action groups which handle emergency cases. They work with a different prisoner every month and stage special campaigns for that prisoner, Mika said.

The U.S. has fewer AI groups per capita than most western European nations, Mika said.

He believes that is partly because AI is a misunderstood group. People think that AI works for prisoners of war or draft resisters, but that's not the case, Moore said.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL includes people from a variety of occupations and ideologies — a cross-cultural group as diverse as the individuals it tries to aid. It avoids political affiliation with any party or group.

Mika and Moore said they joined AI because of their outlook on life and human dignity.

"I really believe in the sanctity of the human spirit; that any good that comes about in this world has to come from within us. When we see something wrong we have

to speak up," Moore said. Mika, an illustrator for an area studio, added that he'd like to see an AI Livonia chapter formed.

"I'm sure there are plenty who would join. There are a lot of concerned people in Livonia," he said. "The problem is that people don't see a direct community need. They don't understand why we help Russians and not Americans."

Amnesty International does not allow members or groups to assist prisoners of their own country, Mika explained. Furthermore, many foreign prisoners have no one else that can help them besides AI.

"There can never be any peace in the world until we forget all the boundaries," said Mika.

Once people understand what AI is trying to accomplish, Mika said, the great majority of people support it. Occasionally AI is criticized for leaning against one country too much.

Membership in a local AI group costs nothing, save for one letter written per month on behalf of a prisoner. Anyone interested in AI can find out more by calling Mika at 459-1987 or Moore at 261-2364.

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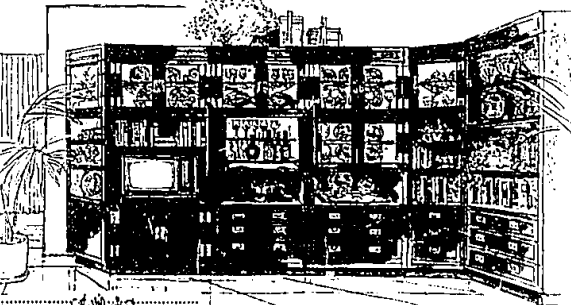


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