



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 12, 2007

Gay Mexican youth fights for refugee status in Canada

One youth's struggle to stay in Canada is the fight of his life.

Leonardo (Leo) Zuniga is a 25-year-old gay from Mexico, where 1,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexuals have been executed in the past 10 years. Zuniga is fighting with the support of his friends in Toronto to gain permanent residency in Canada so he doesn't face the same fate as so many other gay Mexicans.

Thursday, July 12 at 6:30PM, Zuniga's friends and allies in Toronto will gather at the 519 Church Street Community Center to rally around him and learn about the plight that he and other people in similar situations face at an event called *"Invisible Struggle."* The event will include Member of Parliament Olivia Chow signing the Let Leo Stay petition and a panel discussion on the invisible struggle faced by others in Zuniga's position.

"An immigration system that keeps out young, inspirational and courageous community leaders like Leo is a system that desperately needs reform," says Chow, Deputy NDP Immigration Critic. "That's why I'm calling on the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to do the right thing and let Leo stay."

Since Zuniga's arrival in Canada from Mexico, where he faced persecution in all aspects of his life, the young has been active within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexual (LGBT) community of Toronto. He has contributed by leading groups that facilitate LGBT newcomers and immigrants to Toronto and used his own experience as an immigrant gay youth to extend a helping hand to others who might find it more difficult to adjust in their new home.

"I love this country and the tremendous support that I have received from Canadians makes me think that this country loves me," said Zuniga. "Living in an accepting city, in a diverse province, in a tolerant nation is a dream come true."

"I hope that the government is willing to grant my humanitarian grounds application – it would save my life."

"Invisible Struggle" event is the last effort to secure permanent residence in Canada for Zuniga. Because all other avenues have been exhausted, Zuniga's future rests in the hands of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Diane Finley, who has the power to grant Zuniga permanent residency on compassionate and humanitarian grounds.

Date & Time: July 12, 2007, 7:30PM

Photo opportunity: Olivia Chow signing the Let Leo Stay petition with Leonardo Zuniga at 7:00PM

Location: 519 Church Street Community Center, 519 Church Street

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The Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC) is the official voice of youth at City Hall.

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