

EXTERNAL

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Health concern / Prisoners of conscience

23 May 1996

**BELARUS** Yury Khadyka, 57  
Vyacheslav Sivchyk, 34

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Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the well-being of two prisoners of conscience currently awaiting trial in Belarus. Yury Khadyka and Vyacheslav Sivchyk, both leaders of the Belorussian Popular Front (BNF), have been hospitalized as a result of a hunger-strike they began in protest at their arrest after a recent rally commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear power station disaster.

On 17 May 1996, the health of Vyacheslav Sivchyk, who is secretary of the BNF, rapidly deteriorated and he was moved to the prison hospital and then to one of Minsk's clinics. On 21 May, Yury Khadyka, deputy chairman of the BNF and member of the Belorussian Helsinki Committee, was also hospitalized when the state of his health became life-threatening.

A hunger-strike is not in itself grounds for an Amnesty International intervention. However, in the case of prisoners of conscience hunger-striking in protest at their detention, Amnesty International's and the prisoners' demands coincide. The organization therefore urges the Belarus authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the two men and then to provide them with all necessary medical care.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

During the rally in Minsk, on 26 April, demonstrators denounced President Alyaksandr Lukashenko's policy of closer ties with Russia, and his latest crackdown on the trade unions and the opposition press in Belarus. It was reported that regular police and special police forces (OMON) used tear-gas against the demonstrators and beat and ill-treated a number of them. As a reaction to the police actions, it was reported that participants turned over two or three police cars. In all, 204 persons were arrested during the rally and most were kept in detention for between five and 15 days on charges of hooliganism. Most of the demonstrators were later released.

Vyacheslav Sivchyk was arrested on the night of 26 April together with 11 other leaders and activists of the BNF, when the police raided the headquarters of the organization. Without identifying themselves, the officers in masks took away documents from the organization's archive. The chairman of the BNF, Zenon Pozniyak, managed to escape through the back door and is currently in Poland. Yury Khadyka was arrested on 27 April, in front of his home. The rest of the BNF leaders were released after a few days.

Yury Khadyka and Vyacheslav Sivchyk were charged on 29 April with "instigating mass disorder" for having organized the rally (Article 186, part 3 of the Criminal Code of Belarus: "Organization or participation in group actions violating the public order"). The two men each face imprisonment of up to three years. In 1990, Yury Khadyka, a professional physicist, organized the first rally in the then Soviet Union to draw the attention of the world to the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. He was then charged by the Soviet authorities with exactly the same charge: organizing of an unsanctioned demonstration. But soon after that the charges were dropped due to international public attention.

The circumstances of their detention, and the length of their possible sentences, suggest that the two BNF leaders have been targeted by the authorities solely because of their political beliefs and opposition activities. The fact that the rest of the arrested demonstrators and leaders of BNF, and members of other participating opposition organizations were released after a few days, suggests that Yury Khadyka and Vyacheslav Sivchyk were singled out by the authorities. According to Amnesty International's information, the authorities do not appear to have brought any evidence directly linking Yury Khadyka and Vyacheslav Sivchyk to committing or instigating acts of violence during the rally.

The organization is also concerned about the apparent pattern of ill-treatment and imprisonment of members of the opposition during peaceful strikes and demonstrations in Belarus, such as the Independence Day procession in July 1995 and the imprisonment of some of the leaders of the Free Trade Union of Belarus during a strike in August 1995.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Russian or your own language:**

- expressing serious concern for the health of Yury Khadyka and Vyacheslav Sivchyk;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release as prisoners of conscience, detained for their political beliefs and non-violent opposition activities;
- seeking assurances that on release, the two men will be granted access to all necessary medical care;
- seeking assurances that no-one in the future will be subjected to ill-treatment or imprisonment solely on the grounds of their political beliefs and for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of assembly.

**APPEALS TO:**

The President of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenko

Respublika Belarus  
220010 g. Minsk  
pl. Nezavisimosti  
Apparat Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus  
Prezidentu Respubliki Belarus LUKASHENKO A.H  
**Telegrams: Prezidentu Lukashenko, Minsk, Belarus**  
**Faxes: + 375 172 23-58-25**  
**Salutation: Dear President**

The Acting Procurator General of Belarus, Vasiliy Stepanovich KAPITAN

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**Faxes: +375 172 26-41-66**  
**Telegrams: I.O Generalnogo prokurora, Minsk, Belarus**  
**Salutation: Dear Acting Procurator General**

**COPIES TO:**

The Chairman of the Supreme Court of Belarus, Vladimir S. Karavay

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220030 g. Minsk  
Ul. Lenina, 28  
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The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Ulazimir SYANKO

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and to diplomatic representatives of Belarus accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 July 1996.