

URGENT ACTION

CHARGES DROPPED AGAINST ACTIVIST IN BELARUS

The criminal case against Aliaksei Shchadrou, an activist for the homeless, has been dropped. He is no longer facing a two-year prison term in Belarus for “acting on behalf of an unregistered religious organization”.

On 11 September the Investigation Committee closed the criminal case against **Aliaksei Shchadrou**, a 28-year-old devout Catholic. Aliaksei Shchadrou received official documentation on 24 September. The head of Shchyuchyn District Police Department began criminal proceedings against Aliaksei Shchadrou on 11 June under Article 193-1 of the Criminal Code of Belarus, which criminalizes activities by unregistered organizations. He had been charged with organizing “at his place of residence an unregistered religious organization and secured the condition for its functioning without registration in accordance with the procedure established in law” since July 2012. In February and April 2013 police raided his home, during the February raid police confiscated religious books.

Aliaksei Shchadrou has been able to register his organization as a private social care institute “Believe in yourself” on 27 August 2013. Aliaksei Shchadrou had been running a shelter for homeless people, with a prayer room, in his detached house in a village in the Hrodna region, since December 2011. He has provided those in need, including the homeless, alcoholics and drug users, with food, clothing, a bed and a bath. During the cold weather of 2012 and 2013 almost 30 people were living in his shelter.

Amnesty International has been campaigning for the removal of Article 193-1 because it violates the right to freedom of association. Article 193-1 was added to the Criminal Code on 15 December 2005 and any activity on behalf of an unregistered organization, including political parties and religious organizations, became a criminal offence punishable by a fine or imprisonment for up to two years. In 2011 the Council of Europe’s European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) stated that “by its very existence Article 193-1 has a chilling effect on the activities of Non-governmental organizations” and that “the restriction is so severe that it not only restricts freedom of association but also freedom of opinion and expression to an unjustifiable degree.”

No further action is requested at this time from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

Name: Aliaksei Shchadrou

Gender m/f: m

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