

PUBLIC

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MEDICAL ACTION

Renewed call for medical care and release of medical academic

Professor Bandazhevsky, Belarus

Key words physician / unfair trial / prisoner of conscience / ill-health

Introduction

Amnesty International has received information that Professor Yury Bandazhevsky's health has deteriorated drastically. He reportedly suffers from severe depression. Amnesty International is calling for immediate access to appropriate medical care and reiterates its call for his release.

Galina Bandazhevskaya, his wife and a physician, visited her husband in September 2002. She was shocked at his deterioration since she last saw him over three months previously. On 5 June 2002 his conditions of detention improved when he was moved from a large dormitory to a cell for three people, but since then he seems to have developed severe depression.

Galina Bandazhevskaya wrote to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in order to accelerate the individual complaint which has been lodged on her husband's behalf with the UN Human Rights Committee (see appendix).

Background information

Professor Bandazhevsky, a medical academic specialising in nuclear medicine, was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment on 18 June 2001. He was charged and convicted of receiving bribes from students. Amnesty International believes that his conviction is related to scientific research into the Chernobyl nuclear reactor catastrophe of 1986 and his open criticism of the state authorities. The organization considers him to be a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Recommendations

Please write letters in Russian or English to the authorities below, using professionally-headed paper if you use this in your profession:

- Introducing yourself in your professional capacity and/or as a member of Amnesty International;
- Expressing concern about the deterioration in health of Professor Yury Bandazhevsky (detained at UZ 15/1), who seems to be suffering from severe depression;

- Urging the authorities to provide him with appropriate medical care in accordance with articles 22 (1) and 22 (2) of the *UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* which state:

“At every institution there shall be available the services of at least one qualified medical officer who should have some knowledge of psychiatry. The medical services should be organized in close relationship to the general health administration of the community or nation. They shall include a psychiatric service for the diagnosis and, in proper cases, the treatment of states of mental abnormality.

Sick prisoners who require specialist treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civic hospital”;

- Reminding the authorities that Amnesty International considers Professor Yury Bandazhevsky to be a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

You may wish to enclose a copy of Galina Bandazhevskaya’s letter (see appendix).

Addresses

President of the Republic of Belarus

Alyaksandr Hryhoravich LUKASHENKA
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 220016 g. Minsk
 ul. Karla Marksa, 38
 Administratsia Prezidenta
 Respubliki Belarus
 Prezidentu LUKASHENKA A.H.
 Fax: +375 172 26 06 10

Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Justice of the Republic of Belarus

Viktor GOLOVANOV
 Respublika Belarus
 220084 g. Minsk
 ul. Kollektornaya, 10
 Ministerstvo yustitsii Respubliki
 Belarus
 Ministru GOLOVANOVU V.
 Fax: +375 172 20 96 84

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus

Mikhail Khvostov
 Respublika Belarus
 220030 g. Minsk
 Ul. Lenina, 19
 Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Respubliki Belarus
 Ministru Khostovu M.
 Fax: +375 172 27 45 21

Salutation: Dear Minister

The Head of labour colony UZ 15/1

I.I. BAHUR
Respublika Belarus
220600 Minsk
ul. Kalvariiskaya 36

Salutation: Dear Mr Bahur

Head of Medical Staff

M.A. TUSHINSKY
Respublika Belarus
220600 Minsk
Ul. Kalvariyskaya, 36
Director of the Republican Hospital of the Ministry of the Interior
Tushinskomu M.A.

Salutation: Dear Mr Tushinsky

Copies of appeals

Please send copies of your appeals to diplomatic representatives of Belarus accredited to your country.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow-up letter seeking a response, referring to your previous letter(s). Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 2 November, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

Monitoring of actions

If you have access to e-mail you can help our attempt to monitor letter writing actions. If you write one, two or more letters please send us an e-mail and let us know. Please write in the subject line of your e-mail the index number of the action and the number of letters you write
e.g. EUR 49/016/2002 – 3

Please send your message to medical@amnesty.org
Thank you.

APPENDIX

Letter by Galina Bandazhevskaya on the deterioration of her husband's health, sent to the UN Human Rights Committee and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Galina Bandazhevskaya
Ul. Chougaieva, 3-1, appt 454
Minsk - Belarus

M. Ivalyo PETROV
The UN Human Rights Committee,
Palais Wilson, rue des Pâquis
1211 - Geneva
Fax : 0041 22 917 90 22

M. MIGUEL DE LA LAMA
The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention,
Palais Wilson, rue des Pâquis
1211 - Geneva
Fax : 0041 22 917 90 06

Minsk, 6th September 2002

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to you to urge you to help me to save Professor Yuri Bandazhevsky, who has been imprisoned in Minsk for one and a half years. As a physician, I am worried to see how his state of health has suddenly worsened. Prison is not a sanatorium, staying between its walls does not improve your health. Sometimes it is very difficult simply to survive, and not to be destroyed by the attacks of the penitentiary system. The only way to take all this, and to resist, is to believe firmly in something.

My husband believed strongly in science. Science was his god, he knew that his cause was just and that he was working for the benefit of humankind.

I thought that, with the help of those who supported his research, and with the progress in his detention conditions, he would resist and come out as a victor.

But it is precisely after the improvement of his detention conditions, that sudden changes occurred in his physical condition and in his outlook. Professor Bandazhevsky was very thankful and pleased by his new situation. He had been transferred from the common room, where he stayed with 80 other detainees, to a room with 3 beds, with a television. They had even given him a computer for his work. He wrote to me : "I am happy to finally be able to do a productive work, within permitted limits".

In the first period, the whole family felt relieved, because we understood that the possibility to work, to devote himself again to what he loved, would help him to resist, to keep a clear mind in this difficult situation.

But this sense of relief was premature. These new conditions, which I considered to be an improvement, were in reality a trap: I was seeing my husband changing from day to day. Previously, he wrote every day to his family, he shared with us his thoughts, he told us of his plans for the next day, he sent scientific manuscripts to us. In spite of the extremely difficult conditions of his detention, amongst all these detainees, he found the strength to live, work and bolster the morale of his family through his letters.

After June 5th, (date of the improvement of his detention conditions), the letters from my husband got sparser and sparser. He no longer wanted to write about science, he showed no more interest in his children, in family matters.

When I saw my husband for the first time in 3 months (I had no rights to visit him during all this time), I did not recognize him. The man before me was another man, a man crushed, indifferent to his surroundings. His empty eyes, which had a dead look, revealed enormous suffering. He was a man with a split identity, mentally broken.

He asked me to divorce him, while telling me, in the same moment, not to believe in what he was saying or doing just now. He asked me to take into account the situation in which he found himself at the time, and everything which was being plotted around him. I saw that he was suffering, that he was not in a position to tell me openly everything he wanted to tell me. He seemed also not able to express clearly his thoughts. He told me that his thoughts were all mixed up in his head, and that the same thoughts came back to him all the time, like a stuck record: "I do not understand what is happening to me, I am unable to have a clear view of myself".

He told me that his teeth were crumbling, and that he was suffering from constant headaches. I am a physician, and I could well see that I had a sick man in front of me, a man who, due to the efforts of his adversaries, had lost all confidence in himself. He did not even believe any more in what had been sacred to him: his scientific work on the Chernobyl related problems. He had become indifferent to all of this, it frightened him and appeared threatening to him. He told me several times that, when released, he would never again do any scientific research: "I will never again touch this science, linked to radiation". When I asked him how he could betray his cause and let everything go, he responded: "I am afraid for our children".

I do not recognize my husband. When he moved to the radioactive zone with his children, still small, he was clearly conscious of the risks he was taking, but he knew that they were justified by the help he was bringing to the people living in contaminated territories. He told me: "We are physicians, and if something harms our children, we will know how to help them and us, but thousands of other children live in those territories, and they need us too".

And here, after everything he endured to defend his truth, he tells me that he is giving up. He speaks like a frightened man, pushed to the very edge, manipulated, a man permanently abused and under pressure, a man who is being forced to choose between his children and science.

He writes one thing in his letters and gives a different response to my questions.

How is it possible that such changes could occur so suddenly after the conditions of his detention improved?

At the present time, he has completely cut off all contacts with me and our children. He no longer wants to see us during visits, he explains that he has lost confidence even in his family.

It is clear that he is a sick man, a victim of our penitentiary system. They have succeeded in splitting his personality, he is in doubt about himself, disoriented. He has become a man unable to resist, a sort of modelling paste, which one can transform into whatever one wants, which one can drive as one wants to.

I urge you not to let this scientist die. At the present moment, one thing is clear to me, we are losing him. I fear that in several months time, there will be nobody left to be saved.

This is why I urge you to accelerate the individual complaint, which has been registered with UN Human Rights Committee.

I continue to hope that in the XXI century, it will not be permitted to let an innocent man be destroyed.

G. Bandazhevskaya