

PUBLIC

AI Index: EUR 49/10/99

UA 101/99

Fear of Torture or Ill-treatment/

Possible

BELARUS Yuri Zakharenko

There is serious concern for the safety of opposition activist Yuri Zakharenko, who failed to return home on 7 May 1999. Amnesty International fears that he may be in incommunicado detention.

On 7 May at about 8pm he is reported to have telephoned his daughter telling her he was on his way home. His family have not heard from him since. They contacted the police fearing he had been arrested. A spokesperson for the Ministry of Internal Affairs is reported to have said that he is not being held in Minsk, and that his whereabouts were unknown.

His wife believes that he has been arrested by the government for his involvement in the unofficial presidential elections, organized by opposition groups for 16 May in protest against the policies of President Lukashenko. Yuri Zakharenko is believed to be a member of the unofficial electoral commission. He is a senior figure in the opposition movement, who was Interior Minister under the previous government.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1996 President Lukashenko held a referendum which led to the dissolution of parliament. In a further referendum in 1996 he secured a mandate to stay in office until 2001, although an election was scheduled for 1999. Opposition groups argue that President Lukashenko's presidency expires in July 1999 and therefore elections should be held in May 1999.

Yuri Zakharenko failed to return home on 7 May 1999, the day the opposition began their unofficial protests. That day Amnesty International appealed to the Belarusian government and law enforcement officials to ensure that no one was detained or ill-treated during these peaceful protests. The organization stated that "the pattern of ill-treatment and imprisonment of the opposition in Belarus is alarming", noting that in recent months the police had responded with violence to growing political unrest, forcibly breaking up peaceful opposition demonstrations and arresting hundreds of peaceful protesters.

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

- urging that the whereabouts of Yuri Zakharenko be immediately established and made known to his family, and that if detained in police custody he be given immediate access to his family, and to legal representation;
- urging that any criminal charges against him are made public;
- urging that he is protected from any form of ill-treatment.

APPEALS TO:

Due to an unreliable telephone system in Belarus, fax tones may be difficult to obtain. Please keep trying (it can help to dial slowly). Additionally, you may have the most success ringing during office hours as fax machines are sometimes turned off at the end of the working day (+2 hours GMT). If a voice answers, repeat "fax" until connected.

The President of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka
Respublika Belarus, 220010 g. Minsk, pl. Nezavisimosti
Apparat Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus
Prezidentu Respubliki Belarus Lukashenka A.H
Telegrams:Prezidentu Lukashenko, Minsk, Belarus
Faxes:+ 375 172 23 58 25 (office hours only)
Salutation:Dear President

The Procurator General of Belarus, Aleh Bozhelko
Respublika Belarus, 220050 g. Minsk, Ul. Internatsionalnaya, 22
Prokuratura Respubliki Belarus
Generalnomu prokuroru BOZHELKU A.
Telegrams:Generalnomu prokuroru, Minsk, Belarus
Faxes:+ 375 172 26 41 66
Salutation:Dear Procurator General

Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, Yuriy Sivakow
Respublika Belarus, g. Minsk, Ul. Urytskaha, 5
Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del Respubliki Belarus, Ministru Sivakowu
Telegrams:Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del, Minsk, Belarus
Faxes:+ 375 172 26 12 47
Salutation:Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Ivan Antonovich
Respublika Belarus, 220030 g.Minsk, Ul. Lenina, 19
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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 21 June 1999.