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News Flash

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Belarus: New prisoners of conscience

The Belarusian authorities have demonstrated yet again their unwillingness to tolerate any form of political opposition. Yesterday's anti-government demonstrations in Minsk to mark the 10th anniversary of Lukashenko's presidency began with a wave of mass arrests and ended with prison sentences today.

"The Belarusian authorities continue to show a blatant disregard for the human rights of their citizens," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International will be following the cases of those who have been sentenced and considers them to be prisoners of conscience.

Background

A group of young activists were preparing to march through the centre of Minsk, the capital, to join the main events at Bangalor Square when large numbers of OMON special forces and plain clothes police blocked access to the city's central square. A group of about 100 young activists from the Zubr movement found their way barred by an equal number of police. About 50 activists were beaten and loaded onto buses, and bystanders including elderly people were manhandled and dragged out of the way. Some of the detained were released overnight including all minors, but 26 demonstrators spent the night at the Okrestina detention facility. They are standing trial today and the first sentences have already been handed down.

The coordinator of the Zubr movement Evgeny Afrnagel has been sentenced to 10 days administrative detention, Dmitry Bondarenko, coordinator of Charter '97 and other members of Zubr have been sentenced to between two and 15 days and some have been fined 200 - 300 dollars.

According to reports the main events in Bangalor square were attended by about 4,000 people, and were not interrupted, but as those present were leaving the square 50 young activists were detained by police, herded into buses and driven 20 km outside the city where they were dumped. They were beaten, threatened and reportedly personal items such as jewellery and watches were removed. A further group of activists from Orzha in the Vitebsk region were prevented from driving to Minsk by traffic police under the pretext of a licensing problem and forced to return home.

See also: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur490142004>

Public Document

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