

URGENT ACTION

'T-SHIRT WEARER'S' PRISON SENTENCE EXTENDED

Belarusian prisoner of conscience Yury Rubtsou has had his prison sentence extended to two years for "refusing to work" in a penal colony. He was originally sentenced for wearing a T-shirt that called on the president of Belarus to resign.

Prisoner of conscience **Yury Rubtsou**, an activist from the eastern city of Homel, was sentenced by the Pruzhany District Court to two years in prison on 28 May 2015. This extended his original sentence of 18 months, imposed in October 2014 for "insulting a judge" (Article 391 of the Criminal Code). According to the prosecution, Yury Rubtsou had declined several job offers in an open-type prison facility in Brest Region's Pruzhany District, where he was serving his original term. Yury Rubtsou was charged with violating article 415 of the Criminal Code ("Evasion of serving a term of punishment") but the witnesses during the trial said that he was not refusing to work in principle, but instead was protesting against the low wages inside the prison system. He is appealing against this decision and is now held in a pre-trial detention centre in the western city of Baranovichy.

Yury Rubtsou had been detained on 28 April 2014 for wearing a T-shirt with the slogan "Lukashenka [the president of Belarus], leave!" and accused of "failing to obey police orders" and "swearing" during the annual rally to mark the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. He was sentenced to 25 days' administrative detention in a trial in which he appeared bare-chested after police confiscated his T-shirt. The judge ignored Yury Rubtsou's request to provide him with a T-shirt and glasses so that he could familiarize himself with the case materials. Yury Rubtsou called the trial "a mockery" and the judge "a villain". In August 2014 a criminal case was opened against him for insulting the judge during his April court appearance, and on 6 October he was sentenced to two years and six months' imprisonment in an open-type prison facility. His sentence was later reduced by a year under an amnesty law.

Amnesty International believes that Yury Rubtsou's sentence is part of a longstanding pattern of harassment of civil society activists by the Belarusian authorities.

Please write immediately in Belarusian, Russian, English or your own language:

- Pointing out that Yury Rubtsou is a prisoner of conscience, jailed solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that Yury Rubtsou is released immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging them to stop the harassment and intimidation of civil society activists and reminding them of their obligation under international law to respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including Article 19, 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 JULY 2015 TO:

President

Alyksandr Lukashenka
Administratsia Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus
ul. Karla Marksa 38
220016 Minsk, Belarus
Fax: +375 17 226 06 10
+375 17 222 38 72
Email: contact@president.gov.by
Salutation: Dear President

Prosecutor General

Alyksandr Kanyuk
ul. Internatsianalnaya 22
220030 Minsk, Belarus
Fax: +375 17 226 42 52 (Say "fax"
clearly if voice answers)
Email: info@prokuratura.gov.by
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In Belarus civil society activists who try to organize to make their concerns public must operate within the framework of highly restrictive laws, which are applied in ways which violate their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression. Civil society organizations face closure, and individuals face prosecution if they criticize the authorities. Any form of public protest, even a one-person picket, requires an express permission from the authorities, which is rarely granted, and peaceful demonstrators face fines or several days in detention. The lack of freedom of peaceful assembly in Belarus came to the world's attention in December 2010, when a mostly peaceful demonstration following the presidential elections was brutally suppressed by law-enforcement officers. Hundreds of protesters were beaten, arbitrarily arrested and summarily sentenced. All the main opposition presidential candidates and many prominent opposition activists were imprisoned. Former presidential candidate and prisoner of conscience Mikalai Statkevich remains in prison to this day.

Civil society activists are subjected to administrative sanctions when they violate the stringent requirements for public meetings, but they are also subjected to frequent administrative prosecution as a form of harassment. The Administrative Code covers misdemeanours such as "petty hooliganism", "violation of the order for public meetings of pickets", "swearing" and "disobeying police orders", which are frequently used by the Belarusian authorities to intimidate and persecute civil society activists.

Name: Yury Rubtsou

Gender m/f: m

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