

# URGENT ACTION

## BELARUSIAN PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE FREED

**Belarusian prisoner of conscience Yury Rubtsou was released from penal colony in the eastern city of Bobruisk on 22 August.**

**Yury Rubtsou** along with prisoner of conscience and former presidential candidate Mikalai Statkevich and opposition activists Mikalai Dziadok, Ihar Alinevich, Artsiom Prakapenka, and Yauhen Vaskovich were released on the evening of 22 August following a presidential pardon by Alyaksandr Lukashenka citing “humanitarian principles” ahead of scheduled presidential elections on 11 October.

Yury Rubtsou’s release came as a complete surprise to him. He was in a punishment cell in the Bobruisk penal colony when on Saturday evening prison guards told him go to the prison administration office, where he saw a suitcase with his belongings. There he was told that he was to be immediately released under a presidential pardon. He was put on a train to Homel, where he was reunited with his family. His release is not unconditional and Amnesty International is concerned that he will now be placed under “preventive police surveillance” for two years. As a part of the conditions of his release Yury Rubtsou has to notify the authorities if he changes his place of residence and if he travels to another region for more than a month. He can also be called in for arbitrary questioning regarding his lifestyle and behavior. If he commits administrative offences he will be resented for violating the conditions of his release, likely resulting in another term of imprisonment.

Yury Rubtsou was jailed solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. Yury Rubtsou was originally detained in 2014 during a demonstration commemorating the Chernobyl disaster, because he was wearing a t-shirt calling on President Lukashenka to resign. He was sentenced to 25 days’ administrative detention after a trial in which he was forced to appear bare-chested because police had confiscated his T-shirt. The judge ignored Yury Rubtsou’s request to provide him with alternative clothing and his glasses so that he could see and familiarize himself with the case materials. Yury Rubtsou called the trial “a mockery” and the judge “a villain”. On 6 October he was sentenced to two years and six months’ imprisonment in an open prison for “insulting the judge”. His sentence was later reduced by a year under an amnesty law. He was later given two more years on remand for refusing to work on unfair terms while in prison.

**No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all those who sent appeals. Amnesty International will continue to monitor the case and take further action as necessary.**

Name: Yury Rubtsou

Gender m/f: M

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