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## **Belarus urged to release election protesters after student convicted**

Amnesty International has demanded the release of a Belarusian student sentenced today for taking part in a post-election protest - the third similar conviction in the past week.

"It's chillingly clear that the three activists have been sentenced on the basis of trumped up charges just because they dared to criticise elections that were plagued by irregularities," said Nicola Duckworth of Amnesty International.

"These men are prisoners of conscience - jailed for the peaceful expression of their views - and they must be immediately and unconditionally released."

Mikita Likhavid, 20, was sentenced to three years and six months in a labour colony on charges of "mass disorder" for peacefully participating in opposition demonstrations in December.

The conviction follows the sentencing on 24 March of activists Zmitser Dashkevich and Eduard Lobau, allegedly for "hooliganism".

Mikita Likhavid was among protesters beaten by riot police in disturbances that followed Belarus' disputed election on 19 December, in which President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was re-elected for the fourth time amid allegations of rigging.

Law student Likhavid was initially detained for an administrative offence but then faced criminal charges, despite the policeman who filed his arrest warrant admitting in court that he had not seen Likhavid during the protest.

Prominent activist Zmitser Dashkevich, leader of the Young Front organization, and fellow Young Front member Eduard Lobau were last week sentenced to two and four years in a labour colony respectively for allegedly assaulting passers-by the day before the election.

Another Young Front activist present at the time told Amnesty International that the group had in fact been attacked.

He said four men had asked them for directions and then punched Zmitser Dashkevich and Eduard Lobau.

Police arrived within minutes in a police special forces minibus and detained the three activists and two of the attackers without asking any questions.

Zmitser Dashkevich and Eduard Lobau were convicted on the basis of testimony from the two attackers detained with them.

"It appears that Zmitser Dashkevich and Eduard Lobau, as well-known activists, were detained to prevent them taking part in the demonstration on 19 December," said Nicola Duckworth.

The convictions bring the total number of prisoners of conscience connected with the post-election crackdown currently in detention or under house arrest to 15.

### **Background**

In the immediate aftermath of the Belarus presidential election on 19 December, more than 20,000 people gathered in the centre of the capital Minsk to protest against election rigging and show support for opposition candidates.

Seven of the nine opposition presidential candidates were detained in the ensuing police crackdown along with about 500 peaceful demonstrators, many of whom were beaten by riot police.

Trials against those charged in connection with the demonstrations are ongoing.

On 25 March, dozens of political and trade union activists, as well as journalists, were detained to prevent them participating in any activities to mark Freedom Day, the anniversary of the creation of the Belarusian People's Republic in 1918.

According to observers 70 people were detained in connection with the event – 52 in Minsk and 18 elsewhere.