

AI Index: PRE 01/377/2011  
01 August 2011

## **Belarus must drop draconian draft laws banning ‘silent protests’**

The Belarusian government’s proposal to ban almost any kind of protest is yet another assault on the Belarusian people’s right to freedom of expression and assembly, Amnesty International said today.

Following a series of ‘silent protests’ the authorities published on Friday proposed amendments to laws that would require government permission for any gatherings carrying out “action or inaction intended as a form of public expression of socio-political attitude or as a protest.”

Those found guilty of carrying out ‘inactive’ protests could be subject to 15 days administrative detention or a fine

“We urge Belarusian Parliamentarians to drop these draconian amendments to a law which violates international standards on freedom of expression and assembly,” said John Dalhuisen, Deputy Programme Director of the Europe and Central Asia Programme.

According to the Viasna Human Rights Centre, the authorities have detained more than 2,000 people involved in ‘silent protests’. Up to 80 per cent of those initially detained were subsequently sentenced to five to 15 days administrative detention or fined.

The ‘silent protesters’ have been gathering in small and large groups throughout Belarus since June, to show opposition to government policies. In some cases they have applauded or strolled wordlessly. In one action they set their mobile phone alarms to go off simultaneously.

The proposed changes to the ‘Law on Mass Action’ would also impose further restrictions on where demonstrations can be held.

Even without the amendments to the protest laws, it is almost impossible to hold any public gathering in the centre of Minsk.

The authorities have become increasingly brutal in their treatment of demonstrators. Plain-clothes KGB officials have detained ‘silent protestors’ without identifying themselves and peaceful protestors have been beaten.

On occasion law enforcement officers have used teargas to break up the ‘silent protests’ and the government has blocked online social media networks to obstruct organisers.

“These amendments reveal the paranoia at the heart of the Lukashenka regime. They would be laughable if the intention behind them were not so sinister,” said John Dalhuisen. “They must be dropped and the right to peaceful protest – in whatever form – must be respected fully.”