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Belarus: Release of Prisoner of Conscience

Amnesty International welcomes the early release of Belarusian prisoner of conscience Alyaksandr Kazulin. The former opposition presidential candidate was pardoned by a presidential decree on 16 August. The organization regards the release of Alyaksandr Kazulin as a sign that the Belarusian government is increasingly susceptible to international pressure.

Earlier this year, other Amnesty International prisoners of conscience, Zmitser Dashkevich and Alyaksandr Zdzvikhkou, and political prisoners, Artur Finkevch and Andrei Klimau, were also released early.

Despite this positive trend, however, the organization remains concerned about the continuing obstruction, harassment and intimidation that civil society activists face, particularly with regard to violations of their rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression.

Alyaksandr Kazulin, leader of the Belarusian Socialist Democratic Party and former rector of the Belarusian State University was sentenced to five and a half years' imprisonment in July 2006, charged with "hooliganism" and "the organization of group activities that breach public order or active participation in similar activities." The charges followed various incidents at the time of the Presidential elections in March 2006. These included a demonstration which took place on 25 March 2006, at which Alyaksandr Kazulin led protestors to a prison where hundreds of people had been detained during protests following the elections.

Following his sentence, Amnesty International considered that Alyaksandr Kazulin had been targeted for his political activities and called for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience.

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