

PUBLIC APPEAL

Belarus

Arbitrary detention of trade union activists

In recent years the trade union movement in Belarus has led a precarious life. Trade union activists have been obstructed, harassed and intimidated, culminating at the end of 2003 in short-term prison sentences of a number of activists whom AI considered to be prisoners of conscience.



In its 2003 Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) described the predicament of trade unions in Belarus in the following dramatic terms: “Democratic rights are not respected in Belarus, least of all trade union rights. The government has sought by every means to undermine, if not eliminate, the trade unions. Workers are actively discouraged from joining independent trade unions ... Those who do, face continual pressure at the workplace to leave the union or risk losing their jobs. Members of independent trade unions have been arrested for distributing trade union literature, have had materials confiscated and have been denied access to work sites ... Trade union leaders are particularly targets for harassment. Threats are taken very seriously in a country where political opponents to the regime have disappeared.”

1. The arrest of Alyaksandr Bukhvostov in Minsk, 30 October 2003. © private

The imprisonment of Alyaksandr Bukhvostov

On 30 October 2003 the chair of the Belarusian Automobile and Agricultural Machinery Workers' Union, Alyaksandr Bukhvostov, was detained by police in central Minsk for staging a peaceful protest action against the government's alleged interference in the trade union's internal affairs. He reportedly announced his action as follows: “I will be at Oktyabrskaya Square at 4pm. This is imperative. I want to say openly what is happening. The authorities are relentlessly exerting colossal pressure on the Automobile and Agricultural Machinery Workers' Union. People are inciting against my comrades and against the leadership of the trade union. They are being crushed psychologically. They need defending. We have turned to the procurator's office and other organs informing them that pressure is being put on the union. However, to date we have not received a reply from the Prosecutor General's office or from the Ministry of Industry.”

It was alleged that the Ministry of Industry had ordered enterprise managers to exert pressure on the local trade union structures of the Automobile and Agricultural Machinery Workers' Union in order to force them to leave the union and affiliate with a government-sponsored trade union, the Belarusian Trade Union of Industry Workers. Alyaksandr Bukhvostov organized the picket, which he saw as the only remaining option to protest against these alleged actions. On 30 October 2003 Tsentralny District Court in Minsk convicted Alyaksandr Bukhvostov in a closed hearing under Article 167 (1) of the Code for Administrative Infringements for staging an unsanctioned demonstration and sentenced him to 10 days' imprisonment. Amnesty International considered him to be a prisoner of conscience.

TAKE ACTION NOW!

Urgent action is needed. Please write appeals calling on the Belarusian authorities to:

- ensure that Alyaksandr Bukhvostov will not be imprisoned or harassed by the police simply for his political beliefs and for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of assembly;
- stop the deliberate pattern of obstruction, harassment and intimidation of trade union activists, including by imprisonment of activists; the threat of liquidation of independent trade unions and anti-trade union discrimination;
- immediately review laws, regulations and administrative practices relating to the registration and activities of independent trade unions in order that their establishment and free operation be facilitated in accordance with ILO obligations under ILO Conventions Nos.87 and 98 to which it is a party; to comply with the ILO Commission of Inquiry and to implement ILO recommendations;
- adhere to the principles of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (*Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, 9 December 1998.)

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign to prevent and end grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote respect for all human rights. For more information see: <http://www.amnesty.org>

Please write appeals to:

1) President of the Republic of Belarus

Alyaksandr G. LUKASHENKA

Karl Marx Str. 38
220016 g. Minsk
Belarus

:or send a letter directly from his web-site

www.president.gov.by/eng/president/mail.shtml

Fax: +375 (172) 26 06 10 or +375 (172) 22 38 72

E-mail: pres@president.gov.by

2) Minister of the Interior

Vladimir V. NAUMOV

Gorodskoi Val Street 2
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Belarus

Fax: +375 (172) 26 12 47

E-mail: miapress@nsys.by

3) Chairman of the Federation of Belarusian

Trade Unions

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****Showing support and international solidarity to Belarusian trade union activists is one of the objectives of this action; please send a copy to Alyaksandr Bukhvostov: Kulman Str. 4, 220013 g. Minsk, Belarus – Fax: +375 17 284 41 87, E-mail: Bukhvostov@tut.by***