

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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ALES BIALIATSKI IS FREED UNDER PRISONER AMNESTY

Amnesty International welcomes the release of Belarusian prisoner of conscience Ales Bialiatski after nearly three years behind bars. The organization remains concerned that his release was not unconditional and that two remaining prisoners of conscience remain in prison.

Ales Bialiatski was freed from the prison colony in Babruisk, south of Minsk, on Saturday 21 June. He told Amnesty International that his release had come as a complete surprise to him. He was on his way to work, as usual, on Saturday morning, when prison guards told him to go to the prison administration office. There he was told that he was to be released, immediately, under a prison amnesty to celebrate the 70 anniversary of the liberation of Belarus from fascism. He was put on a train to Minsk, where he was welcomed by his wife and a large crowd of supporters.

Ales Bialiatski has said that he believes persistent domestic and international pressure led to his release, which came one year and eight months ahead of his scheduled release date. He stated that he intends to continue his human rights work, as before.

He told Amnesty International's Researcher on Belarus "I want to thank you especially for the moral support. The thing that made a real difference were the letters I got from ordinary people, and I want you to say a special thank you to your activists for that."

His release is not unconditional and he must report every month to his district police station in Minsk. If he commits three administrative offences he will be sentenced again for violating the conditions of his release, likely resulting in another term of imprisonment.

Ales Bialiatski, who is Chair of the Belarusian Human Rights Centre "Vyasna" and vice President of the International Federation for Human Rights was arrested on 4 August 2011 in central Minsk. He was sentenced on 21 November 2011 to four and a half years' imprisonment for 'large-scale tax evasion'. Amnesty International believes he was targeted for his legitimate work as a human rights defender and has been calling for his immediate and unconditional release since his arrest.

His case was recently the focus of an Amnesty International international campaign which coincided with the Ice Hockey World Championships which took place in May in Belarus. The campaign included two other prisoners of conscience, Mikalai Statkevich and Eduard Lobau. The organization will continue to call for their immediate and unconditional release.

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