

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: EUR 49/009/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 222
12 August 2005

Belarus: Prisoner of Conscience Professor Yury Bandazhevsky is free

"I would like to send a huge thank you to all Amnesty International members across the world whose support I could feel. The work of Amnesty International is very useful."

Yury Bandazhevsky, 10 August 2005

The eminent Belarusian academic, Professor Yury Bandazhevsky, was conditionally released from prison on 5 August, after serving four years of an eight year sentence. Speaking to Amnesty International, Yury Bandazhevsky said that he is now spending his time getting used to his freedom and looking into work possibilities. He was released suddenly under a recent amnesty declared by President Lukashenka on 5 May, to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II.

However, Amnesty International is concerned that Yury Bandazhevsky will remain under the authorities' control for the next five years, subjected to various conditions which include having to report regularly to the police, and being prohibited from assuming any managerial or political functions. Amnesty International will continue to campaign for the conditions to be lifted.

Background

On 18 June 2001, Professor Yury Bandazhevsky was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment after being convicted of taking bribes from students seeking admission to the Gomel Medical Institute, where he was a rector. He has always maintained his innocence. Both domestic and international trial observers believed the trial to be unfair and Amnesty International was concerned that he did not have access to a lawyer during his pre-trial detention. Amnesty International adopted him as a Prisoner of Conscience, believing that he was convicted on trumped up charges because of his open criticism of the authorities' response to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Since 1999, Yury Bandazhevsky's case has been taken up by numerous national and international human rights organizations as well as by celebrities, including the popular Russian rock band, Leningrad, and the English rock band, The Cure.