

AI INDEX: EUR 49/11/00  
27 March 2000

## **Belarus: Journalists detained in attempt to silence dissent**

By detaining around 30 journalists covering a peaceful demonstration in Minsk on Saturday, the Belarusian government has again attempted to stem international criticism of its intolerance of dissent, Amnesty International said today.

“This clumsy attempt to silence local and foreign journalists adds to the Belarusian government’s already embarrassing record on human rights”, Amnesty International added.

The Russian embassy in Minsk reportedly intervened to secure the release of several television reporters working for the Russian television broadcasters *NTV*, *ORT* and *RTR*. Reporters from *ORT* and *RTR* have complained that expensive camera equipment was damaged when they were detained. Reporters from the Belarusian service of *Radio Liberty* and *Associated Press* were also among the journalists detained.

The majority of the journalists detained work for Belarus’ independent newspapers. They have been very vocal in their opposition to President Lukashenka’s increasingly unpopular rule and the poor human rights situation in the country. Representatives from the independent *Nasha Svaboda*, *Nasha Niva*, *Kurier* and *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* newspapers were released after several hours.

"Amnesty International has frequently criticized the Belarusian government for its harassment of independent journalists and periodic clamp-downs on the free press. On Saturday it showed the world that its intolerance of independent thought has reached new levels", Amnesty International said.

Between 400 - 500 demonstrators were detained by the police, who were patrolling the centre of Minsk in large numbers. Amnesty International has received reports that police officers used significant amounts of force to detain some protestors. A number of people have complained of being knocked to the ground, beaten with truncheons, kicked by police officers and verbally abused. Most of the detainees were reportedly released between two and three hours later.

"By suppressing the right of Belarusians to peacefully exercise their right of assembly on Saturday and the right of journalists to report it, the authorities violated basic human rights".

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