

URGENT ACTION

CRIMINAL CHARGES DROPPED AGAINST JOURNALIST

The second criminal case against journalist Andrzej Poczobut has been closed, and the charges of “libelling the President of Belarus” have been dropped. He had been targeted for his work as a journalist and for the legitimate exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

On 15 March, criminal charges against **Andrzej Poczobut** were dropped by the Investigative Committee of the Hrodna region, Belarus, due to lack of evidence. The Investigative Committee reached the conclusion that there is no evidence of a crime by Andrzej Poczobut, as the experts fail to agree that he had libelled the President in his articles.

Andrzej Poczobut was arrested on 21 June 2012 in his apartment in Hrodna. He was released on 30 June under bail conditions, which stated that he could not leave Hrodna, where he lives with his family; must appear for interrogation when asked by investigators; and must register with the police three times a month. His bail conditions have now been lifted and he can now travel within Belarus.

Andrzej Poczobut is a correspondent of the Polish daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* and a prominent activist for the Polish minority in Belarus. He was officially charged with “libelling the President” under Article 367 (2) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, for 12 written articles that were published in the Belarusian independent media. He has written about prisoners of conscience in Belarus and criticized the authorities’ response to a wave of silent protests in the country between June and August 2011, when groups gathered without speaking to show opposition to government policies. He also criticized the process and the verdict reached in the criminal case against Uładzslau Kavalyou and Dzmitry Kanavalau, who were both executed in March 2012 in connection with a series of bomb attacks in Belarus.

Andrzej Poczobut continues to serve a three-year suspended prison sentence – imposed on 5 July 2011 – on similar charges for other newspaper articles. Under this sentence he cannot leave Belarus and has to register with the police. Amnesty International will continue to work on Andrzej Poczobut’s case and call for the Belarusian authorities to overturn the conviction of Andrzej Poczobut from 5 July 2011, as well as lift his travel restrictions.

Andrzej Poczobut has thanked everyone who took action on his case.

No further action is requested at this time from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 181/12. Further information: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR49/018/2012/en>

Name: Andrzej Poczobut
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 181/12 Index: EUR 49/003/2013 Issue Date: 19 March 2013

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**

