

URGENT ACTION

STUDENT FACING JAIL OVER TEDDY BEAR PICTURES

Student Anton Suryapin is facing a seven-year jail sentence for posting online photographs of teddy bears carrying placards in support of freedom of expression. He has been charged with “organizing illegal migration”. He is a prisoner of conscience.

Anton Suryapin, 20, a student at Belarus State University's journalism school, was arrested on 13 July. He is facing seven years in prison according to article 371 of the Criminal Code of Belarus (“the organization of illegal migration”). This charge arises from an incident on 4 July, Belarusian Independence Day, when two members of a Swedish advertising company, Studio Total, flew into Belarus from Lithuania in violation of Belarusian law, in a single-engined aircraft. They flew low over the town of Ivyanets, between Minsk and the Lithuanian border, and dropped about 800 teddy bears on parachutes carrying placards calling for freedom of expression in Belarus. According to Belarusian law Anton Suryapin can be held for 10 days after which he must be charged or released. The 10-day period ended on 23 July, and as he has not been released, it is believed that he has been charged under Article 371. His lawyer is unable to disclose any further information. The arrest of Anton Suryapin is the result of his uploading on the Belarusian News Photos website photographs of the teddy bears dropped from the plane. Anton Suryapin maintains that he received the photographs from an anonymous source, and was one of the first to publish photos of the Ivyanets teddy bears.

Syarhei Basharimau, who rents out apartments in Minsk, was detained under suspicion of helping the Swedes cross the border illegally because he had arranged a flat for two of the pilots' associates who travelled to Minsk before the stunt and left immediately afterwards. He was reportedly charged on 16 July under Article 371 Part 3 of the Criminal Code, under which Anton Suryapin is being held, and could also face up to seven years in prison. The pilot, Tomas Mazetti, denounced the arrests in an interview with Charter97 website on 18 July, and said he and his colleague had had no contact with Anton Suryapin and that Syarhei Basharimau had merely handed them the key to a rental apartment.

Please write immediately in Belarusian, Russian or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to release Anton Suryapin and Syarhei Basharimau immediately and unconditionally;
- Urge them to guarantee the right to freedom of expression in line with their international human rights obligations, including Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 SEPTEMBER 2012 TO:

President

Alyaksandr Lukashenka
Administratsia Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus
ul.Karla Marksa 38
220016 Minsk, Belarus
Fax: +375 17 226 06 10/ +375 17 222 38 72
Email: contact@president.gov.by
Salutation: Dear President Lukashenka

General Prosecutor

Alyaksandr Koniuk
ul. Internatsionalnaya 22
220050 Minsk, Belarus
Fax: +375 17 226 42 52 (Please say "fax" clearly if someone answers)
Email: info@prokuratura.gov.by
Salutation: Dear General Prosecutor

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 4 July a Swedish advertising company arranged a stunt to draw attention to violations of freedom of expression in Belarus. Video footage released by Studio Total the following day shows two people in animal masks, one of whom is throwing teddy bears out of the plane.. The Belarusian Ministry of Defence immediately denied that Belarusian airspace had been violated and said the video footage of the event was clearly a fabrication. Police in Ivyanets collected up the teddy bears, but eyewitnesses interviewed by Radio Free Europe and Belarusian independent media said they had seen the teddy bears and the aircraft.

Studio Total say that their campaign was inspired by an action in Minsk in February when Pavel Vinogradov set up a group of stuffed animals carrying placards calling for freedom of expression and complaining of police brutality. He was later sentenced to 10 days' administrative detention for his action. Tomas Mazetti, who piloted the plane, and his colleague Hannah Frey, were supported by two further people including the cofounder of Studio Total, Per Cromwell, who travelled to Minsk to provide support on the ground if necessary.

The Belarusian authorities have detained a number of people in connection with the events of 4 July. Syarhei Basharimau, who runs a flat rental agency in Minsk, was detained on suspicion of having assisted the Swedes to cross the border illegally because he was said to have rented a flat in Minsk to Per Cromwell and his colleague. He remains in custody. A sixteen-year-old girl from Ivyanets was also detained briefly and questioned on suspicion of having taken the photographs that were posted by Anton Suryapin.

Names: Anton Suryapin, Syarhei Basharimau
Gender m/f: M

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