

URGENT ACTION

FREE BELARUSIAN PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Amnesty International is calling for the release of 15 Belarusian activists and journalists who have been charged with 'organizing mass disorder' following a demonstration on 19 December to protest against the results of the Presidential election.

Over 700 people were detained for their participation in the demonstration. Most have since been released after serving short administrative sentences, but key political figures, activists and journalists are still detained in what appears to be a clampdown on opposition activity.

To date, there are 30 opposition activists and journalists, including five Presidential candidates, who have been detained and charged. Their trials are expected to be held in two to three months and they risk being sentenced to up to 15 years' imprisonment. They are reportedly being denied adequate access to lawyers and doctors despite some sustaining injuries during the demonstration after being beaten by riot police.

Amnesty International is gathering information on all 30 detainees. Currently, the organization has sufficient information to confirm that 15 of them did not resort to or incite violence before or during the demonstration. The organization believes that these 15 detainees are facing charges solely because of the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release and for the charges against them to be dropped. Additionally, a further 14 people are in detention awaiting charge, having also been detained following the demonstration. As further information is collated, it is likely that more prisoners of conscience will be identified.

One Presidential candidate, Vital Rymasheusky, and two opposition activists, Anatol Paulau and Aleg Korban have been charged with 'organizing mass disorder' but they have been released from detention. Amnesty International is calling for the charges brought against them to be dropped.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Belarusian, Russian or your own language:

- Calling on the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all 15 prisoners of conscience, listing their names as given overleaf;
- Calling on the Belarusian authorities to drop the charges against all 15 prisoners of conscience, listing their names, as well as the charges against Vital Rymasheusky, Anatol Paulau and Aleg Korban;
- Reminding Belarus that as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it has an obligation to guarantee freedom of expression and assembly to all on its territory, and that anybody prosecuted for the legitimate and peaceful expression of their political views will be considered a prisoner of conscience.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 23 FEBRUARY 2011 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

Prosecutor General

Grigory Alekseevich Vasilevich
Internatsionalnaya str. 22
220050 Minsk
BELARUS

Fax: +375 17 226 42 52

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 264/10 Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR49/015/2010/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

To date, the 15 prisoners of conscience are:

Presidential candidates: Alyaksei Mihalevich, Mykalau Statkevich, Uladzimir Nyaklyayeu and Andrei Sannikau
Journalists: Natallya Radzina, Editor of Charter 97 website, Iryna Khalip correspondent for the Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta, and Syargei Vaznyak, Editor of the newspaper "Comrade"
Political commentator: Alyksandr Fyaduta
Opposition activists: Pavel Sevyarynets an opposition activist and member of Vital Rymasheusky's campaign team, Anatol Lyabedka a member of the United Civic Party, Uladzimir Kobets, a member of Andrei Sannikau's campaign team, Zmitser Bandarenka, the coordinator of the opposition European Belarus campaign, Alyksandr Arastovych, and Syargei Martseleu, members of Mykalau Statkevich's campaign team, and Anastasiya Palazhanka, the deputy leader of the Young Front movement.

Prior to the election, opposition groups called on their supporters to gather in central Minsk after voting finished on 19 December. Up to 30,000 demonstrators gathered and marched to the parliament building unhindered by law enforcement officers, who stopped traffic to allow the demonstrators to pass. At around 9pm, they gathered outside the parliament building and opposition leaders gave speeches. At around 10pm, a group of about 20 masked young men who stood by the doors of parliament armed with batons called on the crowd to storm the building and started to break windows. Eyewitnesses report that presidential candidate, Mykalau Statkevich, who was speaking at the time, called on the crowd to be peaceful. Shortly after this, riot police moved in and cleared the demonstrators from the Square. Many opposition activists were detained at the demonstration and during the following night.

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