

# URGENT ACTION

## BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADERS JAILED

**The organisers of a largely peaceful demonstration in Minsk, Belarus, against the rigging of elections on 19 December have been detained under suspicion of organising mass disorder. They face up to 15 years imprisonment. Among them are six of the nine opposition presidential candidates.**

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 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. One of them, **Andrei Sannikau** was injured during the break up of the demonstration and was detained by police officers on his way to hospital. His wife, **Iryna Khalip**, who was with him, reported the event live on air to a Russian radio station. Another, **Uladzimir Nyaklyayeu** was beaten by law enforcement officers as he made his way to the demonstration and was dragged from the intensive care department of a hospital by police officers. Among those detained is **Natalya Radzina**, the editor of Charter97 news website (see overleaf for full list). There are eighteen in total.

Amnesty International believes that the group have been targeted for legitimately exercising their right to freedom of expression and will consider them to be prisoners of conscience if they are sentenced for organizing or participating in the events of 19 December.

### PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Russian or your own language:

- Calling on President Lukashenka to ensure that those detained for organizing or participating in the demonstrations in Minsk on 19 December are immediately and unconditionally released, listing their names;
- Reminding President Lukashenka that as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Belarus 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;
- Urging the authorities to conduct a thorough and independent investigation into the events of 19 December to determine who was responsible for acts of vandalism to the parliament building and to investigate all allegations of disproportionate use of force by law enforcement officers.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 1 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](mailto:contact@president.gov.by)**

**Salutation: Dear President Lukashenka**

**Send copies to diplomatic representatives of Belarus accredited to your country.**

Check with your section office before sending appeals.

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

List of those detained under suspicion of causing mass disorder:

Uladzimir Nyaklyayeu, Andrei Sannikau, Rygor Kastuseu, Alyaksei Mihalevich, Vital Rymasheusky and Mykalau Statkevich - presidential candidates

Alyaksandr Atroshchenkau, Pavel Sevyarinets, Zmitser Bandarenka, Anatol Lyabedska, Anastasiya Palazhanka, Andrei Dzmitzryeu, Tatsyana Shakal, Alyaksandr Fyaduta, Alyaksandr Klaskousky, Uladzimir Kobets – opposition activists

Iryna Khalip, Natallya Radzina – journalists

The organisers did not apply for permission as required under the Law on Mass Actions, but they did ask to discuss the planned demonstrations with the Ministry of Interior. Their request was turned down. According to the highly restrictive Law on Mass Events public events cannot take place within 200m of underground stations and pedestrian crossings which effectively make it impossible to hold any events in the centre of Minsk and all applications are refused.

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