

URGENT ACTION

FREE BELARUSIAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

Prominent Belarusian human rights defender Ales Bialiatski, who was arrested on 4 August, has now been charged, and his detention order has been extended. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience.

Ales Bialiatski has been in pre-trial detention in the capital, Minsk, since 4 August. On 12 August, he was charged under Article 243.2 of the Belarusian Criminal Code ("concealment of income on a large scale") which carries a prison sentence of up to seven years with confiscation of property. On 15 August, his detention order was extended by two months.

The charges brought against Ales Bialiatski relate to the use of a personal bank account in Lithuania to support the human rights work of Human Rights Centre Viasna in Belarus, of which he is Chair. Several other prominent human rights activists and Human Rights Centre Viasna employees have also been interrogated in relation to the case. The information about the bank account is believed to have been given to the Belarusian authorities by the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice.

Amnesty International recognises the right of the Belarusian authorities to punish legitimate crimes, but the organization maintains that the charges against Ales Bialatski are politically motivated and intended to obstruct his legitimate work as a human rights defender. He is a prisoner of conscience and he should be released immediately and unconditionally.

Viasna was derecognized by the Belarusian authorities in 2003 and as such was barred from opening a bank account in its name in Belarus. Since derecognition, the Belarusian authorities have repeatedly rejected the organization's applications for registration. In 2005 it became a criminal offence in Belarus to act in the name of an unregistered organization, punishable by six months to one year in prison.

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

- Calling on the authorities to release Ales Bialiatski immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging them to drop the charges against Ales Bialiatski
- Urging them to stop the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders, and reminding them that they have a responsibility to protect human rights defenders, as set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which recognises that human rights activity is necessary and legitimate.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 17 OCTOBER 2011 TO:

President

Alyaksandr Lukashenka
ul. Karla Marxa 38
220016 Minsk, BELARUS

Fax: +375 17 226 06 10

+375 17 222 38 72

Email: contact@president.gov.by

Salutation: Dear President

Prosecutor General

Grigory Vasilevich
Internatsionalnaya str. 22
220050 Minsk
BELARUS

Fax: +375 17 226 42 52

Salutation: Dear General Prosecutor

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 240/11. Further information:
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR49/016/2011

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



FREE BELARUSIAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ales Bialiatski, Chairperson of Human Rights Centre Viasna, was detained in the afternoon of 4 August near Victory Square in central Minsk. Earlier that afternoon, the offices of Viasna had been surrounded by men in plain clothes; when staff at Viasna left the building they said they overheard one of the men on the phone saying that Ales Bialiatski was not there.

The men who detained Ales Bialiatski said they were police representatives of the Department of Financial Investigations. They are believed to have taken Ales Bialatski to his apartment, which they searched, confiscating a computer. They then took him to the Viasna office, which they searched for nearly an hour, taking documents and office equipment. They took his wife and child, who had been in the apartment, to their summer home outside of Minsk, which they searched.

Amnesty International believes that Ales Bialiatski's detention is part of a longstanding pattern of harassment of civil society activists and human rights defenders by the Belarusian authorities. Following the Presidential elections there in December 2010, there has been an unprecedented deterioration in the human rights situation in Belarus. Key opposition figures have been detained, ill-treated and convicted in unfair trials. Critical NGOs, civil society activists and journalists face continuing harassment. Human Rights Centre Viasna has been providing assistance to individuals and families affected by the crackdown.

Human Rights Centre Viasna has been active in Belarus since 1998 and registered as a non-governmental organization in 1999. In 2003 its official status was withdrawn following its work on election monitoring and the authorities have repeatedly obstructed the organization's official registration. Following the presidential elections in December 2010, the organization and its staff have come under increasing pressure from the authorities, in a context of widespread harassment of civil society throughout the country.

Name: Ales Bialatski

Gender: m