



Amnesty International Belarus: Public Appeal

23 May 2005, AI Index: EUR 49/008/2006

Mikita Sasim: Prisoner of Conscience

Prominent youth opposition activist Mikita Sasim, who has suffered continual harassment and intimidation by the authorities, was sentenced to three months' imprisonment on 12 May for draft evasion, despite the fact that he had been granted a deferral of his military service. Amnesty International considers Mikita Sasim a prisoner of conscience, who has been detained solely for the non-violent exercise of his right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

He had been arrested on 14 March, five days before the presidential elections. As he was already well-known as a vocal opponent of the government, it seems likely that his arrest was timed to ensure that he was not around during the election period. He was reportedly picked up on the street in the capital, Minsk, and taken to a police station. There he became ill with appendicitis. He was taken to hospital by ambulance, and his appendix was removed that night. He was reportedly handcuffed to his bed and guarded by a police officer during his stay in hospital. After a week, he was moved to the pre-trial detention facility in Baranavichy where he is still held. By the time he was sentenced, on 12 May, by a judge at Baranavichy court, he had already been in custody for two months, and should therefore be released on 14 June.

All Belarusian men aged 18-27 are obliged to do 18 months' military service. Mikita Sasim had expressed his willingness to do his military service but was granted a deferral due to injuries he had reportedly received at the hands of the police at a demonstration in October 2005. At the court hearing, the prosecution insisted that Mikita Sasim had evaded military service by failing to turn up for medical examinations on three occasions, once in October 2005 and twice in January 2006. Mikita Sasim claimed that he missed only one of the three appointments, in October, after he had received the deferral.

Background

Mikita Sasim, who is now 20, has been involved in anti-government demonstrations for the past five years. He was excluded from university in June 2004, after a series of "educational" talks with the university administration about his political activities. Between March 2004 and the beginning of 2005, he was arrested at least 25 times. At a peaceful demonstration in September 2005, the security forces confiscated the banners and flags the demonstrators were using, so Mikita Sasim tied his denim shirt to a pole and waved it like a flag. In response, the security forces reportedly beat him so badly that he had to spend a week in hospital. His peaceful act of defiance was widely reported by national and international media, and inspired Belarusian civil society to adopt denim

blue as a symbol of freedom. The political opposition went on to adopt the same colour in the run-up to the March 2005 presidential elections

For further information on Mikita Sasim please see AI UK's Individuals at Risk case-sheet at: <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/gcc/2005/cases/sasim/>

TAKE ACTION NOW!

Please send cards or letters of support and solidarity to Mikita Sasim. You can write in Belarusian, Russian, English or your own language. Your good wishes will be an invaluable source of support at this difficult time. Please send your greetings to:

Mikita Sasim
Pre-trial detention centre No. 6
Brestskaya Street, 258a
Baranavichy
Brest region 225320
BELARUS

Please write appeals to arrive as quickly as possible to the Belarusian authorities, in Belarusian, Russian, English or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to release Mikita Sasim immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for the non-violent exercise of his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- calling on the authorities to allow their citizens to exercise their right to peaceful protest, without subjecting them to arbitrary detention, ill-treatment or other harassment.
- reminding the authorities that Belarus has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which Article 19 guarantees the right to freedom of expression.

President

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Salutation: Dear President Lukashenka

Procurator General

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Salutation: Dear Procurator General

Minister of Internal Affairs

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Salutation: Dear Minister