

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **BELARUS SCORES OWN GOAL WITH DETENTION OF ACTIVISTS AHEAD OF ICE HOCKEY WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP**

As Belarus prepares to host the Ice Hockey World Championship from 9 to 25 May, 16 civil society activists have been arrested in Minsk in an attempt to stifle dissent and silence those who may use the championship to highlight human rights concerns in the country. They have been sentenced to various terms of administrative detention from 5 to 25 days.

On 26 April, eight people were detained following a peaceful march in Minsk to mark the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The authorities had given permission for the march to take place, which is a legal requirement in Belarus. Five people were arrested immediately after the event and three were arrested on their way home. They were all charged with 'petty hooliganism' and 'disobeying police orders' and sentenced to between 15 and 25 days' administrative detention. A human rights activist in Belarus told Amnesty International "their arrest was illegal, arbitrary, and aimed at intimidating protesters, as well as continuing the practice of political repression against civil society activists, particularly on the eve of the upcoming championship."

Eight other activists were detained in the days before the march. Among them was a prominent youth opposition leader and former prisoner of conscience, Zmitser Dashkevich, who ended a three year prison term in August 2013. Having been arrested outside his home on 24 April, Zmitser was sentenced to 25 days' administrative detention for 'disobeying police orders' and 'violating restrictions imposed on him following his release from prison.' His detention will last for almost the entire period of the championship. Zmitser reported that he spent the night before his court hearing on the concrete floor of a police cell with no food or water.

Another activist and well-known anarchist, Aliaksandr Frankevich was approached by the police and arrested on his way home after work. He was charged with 'disobeying police' and 'swearing'. On 25 April he was sentenced to 25 days' administrative detention.

Amnesty International is concerned for the health of Maksim Viniarski, from the campaign organization *European Belarus*, who was arrested on 22 April in Minsk and told by police that he 'resembled a wanted person'. Later that day he was charged with 'disobeying police orders' and sentenced to 12 days' administrative detention. He immediately began a hunger-strike to protest his innocence. His lawyer is requesting that he be released to a hospital as his health is deteriorating rapidly. This demand was also made by the emergency medical services who visited him in prison on 27 April but so far, the penitentiary authorities have refused to transfer him.

The five remaining activists were sentenced to between five and ten days' administrative detention. Aliaksandr Stepanenka and Uladzimir Siarheyev who are both activists of the youth organization *Alternativa* were released after five days. Illia Dabratvor, an activist from the movement *Razam*, Anatol Mirashnichenka and Uladzimir Zapasau were sentenced to ten days' and are still in detention.

Amnesty International regards all those detained as prisoners of conscience and is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of those still detained. They are: Illia Dabratvor, Zmitser Dashkevich, Aliaksandr Frankevich, Mikalai Kolas, Dzianis Kornau, Aliaksandr Kurbaskin, Anatol

Mirashnichenka, Uladzimir Novikau, Yury Rubtsou, Leanid Smovzh, Aliaksandr Stukin, Valery Tamin, Maksim Viniarski and Uladzimir Zapasau.

In addition, Maksim Viniarski must be ensured immediate access to adequate health care, if necessary in hospital, as called for by the emergency medical services.

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