



Minister of Defence of the Republic of Belarus  
Colonel-General Leonid Maltsev

220034, Minsk, Kommunisticheskaya 1  
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21 January 2009

**Re: Concerns with the Conscription of Civil and Political Activists**

Dear Minister,

The Human Rights House Foundation (Norway) is concerned about the numerous cases in Belarus where youth activists, previously declared unfit for military service, are nevertheless conscripted in retaliation for their civic or political activism.

We are especially concerned about the fate of the youth activists Ivan Shyla and Franak Vyachorka. Franak Vyachorka, who is the head of *BPF Youth*, was sent to the Republican Military Hospital in September 2008, despite the fact that the physical evaluation board had declared him unfit for military service in the summer/autumn of 2008. While the medical examination in hospital was still underway, Vyachorka was violently taken to the military enlistment office by unknown people and declared able-bodied by the draft board.

Ivan Shyla, who is the deputy head of the local branch of *Young Front* in Salihorsk, was considered unfit for military service in November 2008, but was caught by Salihorsk policemen near his house and brought in to the military enlistment office on 12 January 2009 for examination. Under the pressure of KGB agents, Shyla was this time found able-bodied for military service.

The Human Rights House Foundation observes a discriminatory character, based on the grounds of political activities, in the way that the state treats youth activists and is, therefore, worried about the fates of Vital Karatysh and Zmitser Zhalezniczenka, members of the *BPF Party*, Ales Kalita, former head of the *BPF Youth*, Zmitser Fedaruk, activists of the *Young Front*, Pavel Kuryianovichan, activist of the *European Belarus*, youth activists Pavel Batuyeu, Fiodar Charankou, Ales Krutkin, Artsiom Zabaryn and Uladzimir Siarheyau, and the Belarusian students who study at the European Humanities University in Vilnius, Lithuania, and within the framework of the Kalinouski program in Poland.

There are many indications that the conscription of these civil and political activists was organised by the Belarusian secret services. The youth activists were usually detained by persons in civilian clothes who guarded them to the military enlistment offices. Previous medical conclusions, according to which some of them were found unfit for army service in peaceful time, were ignored. Representatives of the secret services actively interfere with the events related to drafting of the above mentioned persons into the army.

The Human Rights House Foundation considers the discriminatory treatment of youth activists to be a breach of Article 26 of the 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights', adopted by the UN General Assembly on 16 December 1966. This treaty, which has been ratified by Belarus states that *"all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."*



We also remind you of Article 12 of the UN General Assembly Resolution 53/144 of 8 March 1999, under the name of the 'Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms' which states that *"everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms."* (Article 12.1) and *"the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration."* (Article 12.2)

In addition, we want to inform you that apart from being a human rights violation in itself, a discriminatory treatment of youth activists could lead to other human rights violations such as the violation of the right to health and the right to liberty. As a consequence, the Belarusian state will be responsible for these violations.

The Human Rights House Foundation strongly urges the Belarusian armed forces to respect the conclusions of doctors regarding the health status of youth activists and abide by the legal requirements pertaining to the conscription of persons to the military service.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maria Dahle'. The script is cursive and fluid.

Maria Dahle  
Executive Director  
Human Rights House Foundation