



Chairman Valentin Sukalo
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The Human Rights House Foundation and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee deeply regret the Supreme Court of Belarus' ruling to uphold the decision of Vitebsk oblast court against human rights defender Leonid Svetsik.

The Supreme Court's judicial division for criminal cases dismissed the appeal of Svetsik and decided that the verdict of the lower court could not be cancelled or changed. On 16 July 2009 judge Urbanovich found Leonid Svetsik guilty of stirring up national hatred and sentenced him to a fine of 31.500.000 Belarusian rubbles (\$10 890) under Article 130(1) of the Criminal Code of Belarus.

The Human Rights House Foundation and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee have been closely following the case of Leonid Svetsik and repeatedly expressed their concerns to the Belarusian authorities. We believe the decision is politically motivated to restrict his right to act as a human rights defender.

On 16 July 2009 judge Urbanovich found Leonid Svetsik guilty of stirring up national hatred and sentenced him to a fine of 31.500.000 Belarusian rubbles (\$10 890).

Leonid Svetsik is an internationally recognized human rights defender from the Vitebsk region. He has participated in the preparation of five complaints concerning Belarusian authorities' violations of citizens' rights, and all five cases were accepted for consideration by the UN Committee on Human Rights in Geneva. In addition, he is an active human rights defender inside Belarus. In August 2009 he initiated an amendment to the labour laws in order to stop discrimination of citizens. The Constitutional Court considered his address and adopted a recommendation for the amendment to the Labour Code and the Law on the Employment of the Population of the Republic of Belarus.

The Human Rights House Foundation and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee have been closely following the case of Leonid Svetsik and repeatedly expressed their concerns to the Belarusian authorities about their attempts to restrict his right to act as a human rights defender in assisting victims of human rights violations.

On 26 May 2009 the Human Rights House Network, represented by more than 30 human rights organisations, including the Human Rights House Foundation and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, sent a letter to the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Belarus Valentin Sukalo and called for a public hearing of the case that complies with all standards and principles of fair trial.

On 22 May 2009, the Belarusian Human Rights House in exile in Vilnius sent a letter to the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Belarus Valentin Sukalo calling the investigation of the Belarusian KGB a persecution of Mr Svetsik and urging the Belarusian authorities to have a hearing that would comply with all standards and principles of fair trial, such as equality of parties, presumption of innocence, and adversarial principle will prevent the interested parties from turning the trial into an instrument of reprisal.

On 9 April 2009 the Human Rights House Foundation and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee sent a letter of concern to the Belarusian KGB, the Prosecutor's Office of Vitebsk, the General Prosecutor's Office of



Belarus as well as the Ministry of Internal Affairs urging them to carry out a transparent and impartial investigation of the charges brought against Leonid Svetsik.

Background information

In 2006–2007, Leonid Svetsik was rendering legal aid to Vitebsk activists who received threat letters on behalf of unregistered pro-Nazi organization Russian National Unity, was helping to prepare complaints to prosecutors. A criminal case over the fact of threats from RNU was instigated by Vitebsk KGB only on 20 May 2008.

In May 2008, KGB carried out a nine-hour search of Svetsik's apartment in Vitebsk. During the search, the KGB confiscated Svetsik's computer, printed human rights related material and a certificate from the Council of Europe. After the search, Svetsik was brought to the KGB office of Vitebsk region where he was interrogated. Later, Svetsik and Uladzimer Bazan, the former editor-in-chief of the *Vitebski Kurier* newsletter, were warned by the regional KGB office and ordered not to comment on the ongoing investigation of the threats by the neo-Nazi organization Russian National Unity (RNE) to certain citizens, all for 'security reasons.'

Leonid Svetsik was mentioned as a witness in the case, but later he became a suspect under Article 130.1. The criminal case against him was suspended in September 2008.

On 31 March 2009, however, he was charged under two articles of the Criminal Code: stirring up national or religious hatred (Article 130) and libel against the president of Belarus (Article 367). The human rights activist had to give a written pledge not to leave the town.

Leonid Svetsik claims his innocence and believes his conviction is retaliation for his human rights activities.

Sincerely,

Ane Tusvik Bonde
Regional Manager for Eastern Europe and Caucasus
Human Rights House Foundation

Berit Lindeman
Head of Information
Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Copies have been sent to:

Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders
UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression
The OSCE/ODIHR, Warsaw
The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
The Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs of the Norwegian Parliament
The Human Rights House Network