



To:

Mr. **Alexander Lukashenko**

President of the Republic of Belarus

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Civil Rights Defenders (Sweden), Belarusian Human Rights House (Lithuania), Human Rights House Foundation (Norway) and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee condemn the detention of the activists of the Human Rights Center 'Viasna' Ales Bialiatski, Valiantsin Stefanovich and Iryna Toustsik, as yet another case in which the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of speech are severely restricted by Belarusian authorities.

The three activists from the Human Rights Center 'Viasna' were arrested on 23 March 2010 in Minsk for holding a peaceful protest against death penalty and the execution of two recent death sentences. On 24 March 2010 the arrested protesters were convicted by a court of violation of the Civil Code and fined. The two death sentences were pronounced in the mid of negotiations that the government of the Republic of Belarus is having with the Council of Europe, in order to declare a moratorium on the death penalty.

The freedom of assembly and expression are fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by the Republic of Belarus on 12 November 1973. Article 21 of the ICCPR states; "the right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

Although freedom of assembly is provided for under Belarusian law, the authorities have in a number of cases decided not to give permission to hold peaceful assemblies. This practice is not in line with Article 21 of the ICCPR and is therefore a violation of the freedom of assembly.

We urge the authorities of the Republic of Belarus to protect and promote the rights and freedoms of citizens enshrined in the national legislation and the international treaties to which the country is a party.

We call upon the Belarusian authorities to put an end to the harassment against all human rights defenders, including at the judicial level.

Sincerely,

Civil Rights Defenders
Norwegian Helsinki Committee
Human Rights House Foundation
Belarusian Human Rights House in exile in Vilnius

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