

To the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers

Ms. Gabriela Knaul

We, the undersigned human rights organizations of the Republic of Belarus and individual human rights defenders in personal capacity, would like to inform you about ongoing persecution of Belarusian lawyers. We notified you on the debarment of four lawyers – Uladzimir Toustsik, Tamara Harayeva, Aleh Aheyev, and Tatsiana Aheyeva – in a letter on 18 February 2011.

As we found out on 19 February, **Aliaksandr PYLCHANKA**, the Chairperson of the Minsk City Bar, was excluded from the Board of Experts on Advocacy in the Republic of Belarus by an Order of Viktor Halavanau, the Minister of Justice of Belarus (No. 36, 18/02/2011) http://minjust.by/ru/site_menu/news?id=784.

We have every reason to believe that the expulsion of Pylchanka from the Board was caused by his comment on the debarment of Toustsik, Harayeva, Aheyev and Aheyeva. In an interview to BelaPAN agency, Aliaksandr had shared an opinion of the Bar leadership about the current situation in Belarus as “critical and seriously threatening the independence of advocacy”, since “the fore aforementioned lawyers had never been lodged complaints against in terms of their professionalism, neither had there been any disciplinary proceedings against them ever initiated”. He also told a journalist that the Minsk City Bar had discussed the initiative of the Ministry of Justice on adopting new rules of ethics for lawyers. This kind of rules, he stressed, “should be adopted exceptionally by the community of lawyers” <http://belapan.com/archive/2011/02/19/451081/>.

According to the Paragraph 12 of the Provisions of the Board of Experts on Advocacy in Belarus, approved by the Ruling of the Ministry of Justice of Belarus on 29/10/2003 No. 27, the Board is entitled to consider applications by advocacy license-seekers, to initiate inspections on their eligibility and deliver appropriate conclusions as well as to bring proposals on the withdrawal of advocacy licenses and to consider other issues related to the licensing of advocacy.

We ask you to react to this message as soon as possible and take necessary action within your mandate.

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