



**HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE  
FOUNDATION**

**Concerns with alarming human rights situation in Belarus**

4 May 2011

The Human Rights House Network is deeply concerned about the actions taken by the Belarusian authorities, police, KGB, and judicial system against human rights defenders and their organisations, lawyers, journalists, students, and other citizens of the Republic of Belarus.

Recent actions show that the widespread human rights violations perpetrated in the aftermath of the 19 December 2010 presidential election have now turned into a crackdown against those who dare to express their opinion and be critical towards the Belarusian government. Since 19 December 2010, many people have been detained, mistreated, and summarily sentenced. We are, therefore, deeply concerned about the fact that the situation continues to deteriorate.

We see intensified **restrictions of activities of human rights defenders and activists**. Human rights defenders are harassed, regularly interrogated, organisations' premises and private homes searched, warnings issued against individuals and organisations, some are threatened.

On 19 April 2011, the Belarusian human rights defender Pavel Levinau was arrested based on ungrounded charges. On 20 April, he was sentenced to 10 days of administrative detention. Pavel Levinau is actively engaged in the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, which is a partner of the Belarusian Human Rights House in exile in Vilnius. He is a respected human rights defender who works for the increased knowledge of international law in Belarus and for respect by the Belarusian authorities of the Republic's international engagements.

Moreover, three civil and political activists from the Vitebsk region were recently detained. Two activists reported punitive actions and ill-treatment by police officers whilst in detention. One of them reported threats of sexual violence against her on the part of one of the police officers.

Furthermore, the state is **increasingly interfering in and suppressing activities of lawyers**. Six lawyers have been disbarred since December 2010. In addition, the 15 April 2011 Order No. 96 of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus hinders human rights education of lawyers. According to the order, lawyers must require permission of relevant bar associations for lawyers to take part in educational programs abroad and to identify the relevance of such participation by requesting lawyers to report on their activities. The recent restrictions against lawyers constitute a grave breach of the right to legal counsel for those arrested and detained, and the right for lawyers to practice law independently and freely from any pressure. We remind that the Belarusian authorities have accepted to "ensure that all prisoners or detainees have access to legal counsel and relatives" (Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendation 97.31), which is not guaranteed today.

**Journalists are continuously pressured** in Belarus. Many journalists were detained after the 19 December 2010 events in Minsk and some were even prosecuted for their participation in the demonstrations. Recently, the Belarusian Ministry of Justice filed a lawsuit to the Supreme Economic Court of Belarus seeking the closure of *Nasha Niva* and *Narodnaya Vola* newspapers. Members of the Belarusian Association of Journalists and those of various digital and print media have received official warnings from the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Belarusian KGB, which can be used as grounds for shutting them down. On 28 April 2011, Dunja Mijatović, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, expressed alarm over this situation, "This move by the Belarusian government to silence a few remaining critical voices will



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further diminish media pluralism in the country.”

After the deadly bomb explosion in the Minsk underground on 11 April 2011, we have received information about the police claims that human rights activists are suspected of being involved in the terrorist attack. Public **declarations** by the Belarusian officials also tend to accuse opposition leaders and human rights defenders of involvement in this attack, with no proof. Whilst condemning this horrific act, we urge the Belarusian authorities to respect the work of human rights defenders and publicly acknowledge it, and take all measures to ensure that no person will be unduly charged with criminal offences, including those related to the criminal acts of 11 April 2011.

The Belarusian government had given some hope for respect for human rights by accepting to “guarantee freedom of association and expression for all citizens, including the press, human rights defenders, political parties, civic organisations and trade unions” (Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendation 97.39). Belarus has also accepted, amongst many others, to “Take the necessary measures to ensure freedom of expression and association of everyone and, specifically, (i) simplify the registration procedure for public associations, including nongovernmental organizations, political parties and trade unions; (ii) remove the prohibition against any activity by non-registered associations; and (iii) abolish article 193-1 of the Constitution, which criminalizes the carrying out of an activity within such a non-registered organization” (UPR recommendation 98.28).

**We consider the recent repressions and attacks against human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, students and other Belarusian citizens a worrying trend to silence critical voices, amounting to grave violations of fundamental human rights, enshrined in the Belarusian Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Belarus is a state party. Concerned about the above mentioned situation, we hereby:**

- **Call upon the Belarusian authorities to stop repressions against human rights defenders and their organisations, lawyers, journalists, students, and other Belarusian citizens, and allow them to realize their fundamental human rights, enshrined in the ICCPR;**
- **Urge the Belarusian authorities to uphold their international commitments, particularly respect for human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly and the right to fair trial, as provided in the ICCPR;**
- **Call upon the Belarusian authorities to accept all visits to its country by the United Nations representatives, including the Human Rights Council special procedures, and to allow the reopening of the OSCE Office in Minsk.**
- **Urge the Belarusian authorities to accept activities of international non-governmental organisations in Belarus.**

**For more information, please contact:**

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***About the Human Rights House Network ([www.humanrightshouse.org](http://www.humanrightshouse.org))***

*The Human Rights House Network is a forum of cooperation between established and emerging Human Rights Houses, uniting 70 NGOs in 15 countries in Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, East and Horn of Africa, and Western Europe. HRHN's aim is to protect, strengthen and support human rights defenders and their organizations. The Human Rights House Foundation, based in Oslo (Norway) and Geneva (Switzerland), is the secretariat of the Human Rights House Network.*