



## Belarus closes borders before trial

Representatives from human rights organisations, including Civil Rights Defenders, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Human Rights House Foundation and International Partnership for Human Rights, have been denied visa for travel to Belarus and cannot attend the trial of Ales Bialiatski, leader of the human rights organisation Viasna. This clearly shows that the trial is politically motivated.

- The fact that Belarus is closing the borders for international observers reinforces our concern that Ales Bialiatski will not get a fair and just trial, said Marie Månson, Civil Rights Defenders.

On November 2 starts the trial of Ales Bialiatski, who is suspected of serious tax evasion and faces up to seven years in prison. As Viasna has not been able to register since 2003, and thereby could not operate legally in Belarus, the staff was forced to open private bank accounts abroad. The charges are connected to the functioning of these accounts.

- The Belarusian regime is tightening its grip, said Berit Lindeman, Norwegian Helsinki Committee. We have seen journalists and political opposition being put in prison. Now the persecution has reached human rights defenders, for whom Ales Bialiatski is the most prominent representative.

Ever since the presidential election in December 2010, the human rights situation in Belarus has been in free fall. The regime has put all its energy to repress civil society and the political opposition.

In October, the Belarusian parliament without any public debate adopted a number of legislative changes, which restrict freedom of assembly and association even more. – In addition, the changes allow for significant expansion of the powers of KGB, said Ane Tusvik Bonde, Human Rights House Foundation.

The trial of Ales Bialiatski starts at 10.00 am on November 2 in Minsk Maskouski district court.

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