



**HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE  
FOUNDATION**

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24 January 2012

### **Call for immediate release and rehabilitation of Ales Bialiastki**

**The condemnation of Ales Bialiastki illustrates how seriously threatened freedom of association and freedom of expression are in Belarus.**

**We call upon Belarusian authorities to immediately release and drop all charges against human rights defender Ales Bialiastki; to fully rehabilitate him and to ensure unhampered activities of human rights and other civil society organizations.**

On January 24, the cassation appeal against the verdict of the Pershamaiski District Court of Minsk, of Ales Bialiastki, Head of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" in Belarus, Vice-president of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and one of the founders of the Belarusian Human Rights House in exile, left the sentence against Ales Bialiastki in force: 4.5 years imprisonment in a higher security colony and confiscation of properties. The latter disregards the fact that all the taxes and penalties imposed on Ales Bialiastki have been fully paid by the time of the appeal hearing.

On 4 August 2011, Ales Bialiastki was arrested in Minsk. We see Ales Bialiastki's detention since August 2011 as a direct result of his legitimate activities in defence of human rights in Belarus.

On 24 November 2011, Ales Bialiastki was sentenced to 4.5 years imprisonment with the confiscation of his property, including the property registered with other persons, on charges of tax evasion.

Today's verdict is the consequence of the restrictions to the rights of freedom of association and expression imposed in Belarus. As many NGOs in Belarus, "Viasna" was repeatedly denied its registration, a refusal qualified as unfounded by the United Nations Human Rights Committee. Therefore, Ales Bialiastki was forced to develop his human rights activities underground. He was not allowed to associate with others and express his opinions freely.

Today's verdict validates a sentence in open violation to the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, including the rights, amongst others, to conduct human rights work individually and in association with others, to the lawful exercise of the occupation or profession of human rights defender, and to solicit, receive and utilize resources for the purpose of protecting human rights (including the receipt of funds from abroad)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, A/RES/53/144, 8 March 1999.



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States have a responsibility to implement and respect all the provisions of the above mentioned Declaration as well as to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action resulting from the legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration.

Ales Bialiatski and his counsel will submit in due time a supervisory appeal to the chairman of the Minsk city court and subsequently to the Supreme Court.

**We call upon the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Belarus to immediately drop all charges held against Ales Bialiatski. We also urge Belarusian authorities to fully rehabilitate Ales Bialiatski.** We believe that Belarusian authorities have to take all necessary measures to allow human rights defenders to work freely and with no abusive restrictions, including by providing registration to human rights organisations and to stop using the registration of NGOs as a tool to repress critical voices.

Sincerely,

- Armenian Helsinki Association
- Human Rights House Baku
  - Association for the Protection of Women's Rights after D. Aliyeva (APWR)
  - Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan (AHRC)
  - Legal Education Society
  - Media Rights Institute
  - Women's Association for Rational Development (WARD)
- Human Rights House Belarus in exile (Vilnius)
  - Belarus Watch (ByWatch)
  - Belarusian Association of Journalists
  - Belarusian Helsinki Committee
  - Human Rights Centre Viasna
  - Public Association "Centar Supolnasc"
- Human Rights House Sarajevo
  - Association of Female Citizens "Renaissance"
  - Foundation CURE
  - Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina
  - Regional Co-ordinator for Youth Groups
  - Serb Civic Council - Movement for Equality - The Council of the Sarajevo Canton
  - Woman and Society Centre
- Human Rights House Zagreb
  - APEO/UPIM Association for Promotion of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities
  - B.a.B.e.
  - CMS - Centre for Peace Studies
  - Documenta - Centre for Dealing with the Past
  - GOLJP - Civic Committee for Human Rights
  - Svitanje - Association for Protection and Promotion of Mental Health



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- Human Rights House Tbilisi
  - The Human Rights Centre Georgia (HRIDC)
- Human Rights House Skopje
  - Macedonian Women's Rights Centre (MWRC) - Shelter Centre
- Human Rights House Oslo
  - FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN)
  - Health and Human Rights Info
  - Human Rights House Foundation
  - Norwegian Burma Committee
  - Norwegian Helsinki Committee
  - Norwegian Tibet Committee
- The Rafto Foundation for Human Right Norway
- Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights YUCOM Serbia
- Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union
- Article 19 UK
- Index on Censorship UK

*Copies have been sent to:*

- The Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Geneva
- The UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Geneva
- The UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Geneva
- The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Geneva
- The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE ODIHR), Warsaw and Minsk
- The Delegation of the European Union in Belarus
- The Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament, Brussels
- The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs of the Norwegian Parliament
- The Norwegian Embassy in Belarus
- The Norwegian delegation to OSCE
- The Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The Mission of Belarus to the UN in Geneva
- The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders

**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.