



**HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE
FOUNDATION**

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Urgent appeal for immediate release and full rehabilitation of all political prisoners and for discontinuing the practice of arbitrary detention

Dear Sirs,

Arbitrary detention is used in Belarus against political opponents and persons exercising their freedoms of conscience, opinion and expression. The use of arbitrary detention as a tool of systematic repression of critical voices constitutes a serious violation of human rights as the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention underlines¹. We urge the authorities of the Republic of Belarus to release all political prisoners and to compensate them for the harm suffered.

The recent liberation of Andrei Sannikov, presidential candidate at the December 2010 elections, and Dmitry Bondarenko, his deputy and one of the coordinators of the civil campaign "European Belarus", has to be followed without delay by the release and full rehabilitation of all the remaining political prisoners in the country, including Ales Bialiatski, 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.²

The detention of Ales Bialiatski since August 2011 illustrates a consistent pattern of restrictions to the rights to freedom of association and expression imposed in Belarus. Like many NGOs in Belarus, "Viasna" was repeatedly denied registration, a refusal that forced Ales Bialiastki to develop his human rights activities underground. This refusal was qualified as unfounded by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, and is also in open violation of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders,³ and of the recent United Nations declaration on human rights, democracy and rule of law⁴.

¹ Report of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to the Human Rights Council, 26 December 2011.

² See: <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17898.html>.

³ Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 9 December 1998.

⁴ United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on Human rights, democracy and rule of law, 19 March 2012.

In order to comply with its international obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Republic of Belarus has the responsibility to protect those of its citizens working for human rights and to ensure that all its citizens can participate in public affairs. The recent release of two of its political prisoners underlines that detention is used in an arbitrary way in the country. Instead of showing a sign of good will, it is a sign of the lack of independence of justice that confirms that those prisoners, as all political prisoners in the country including Ales Bialiatski, were detained because of their human rights, civic and political engagement.

We therefore urge the authorities of the Republic of Belarus:

- **To immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners, including Ales Bialiatski;**
- **To expunge convictions of political prisoners and to reinstate them in their rights;**
- **To ensure adequate compensation for the harm suffered by political prisoners and their families;**
- **To discontinue the use of arbitrary detention against political opponents and persons exercising their freedoms of conscience, opinion and expression;**
- **To take all necessary measures, including those recommended by the United Nations Committee against Torture, to ensure the independence of justice for all in Belarus.**

Signatories:

- Armenian Helsinki Association
- Human Rights House Belarus in exile (Vilnius)
- Human Rights House Zagreb
 - APEO/UPIM Association for Promotion of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities
 - B.a.B.e - Be Active Be Emancipated
 - 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
- Human Rights House Oslo
 - Human Rights House Foundation
 - Norwegian Burma Committee
 - Norwegian Helsinki Committee
- The Rafto Foundation for Human Right Norway
- Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Poland
- Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia
- Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights YUCOM Serbia
- Index on Censorship UK

Copies have been sent to:

- Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Geneva
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion

and Expression, Geneva

- UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Peaceful Assembly and Association, Geneva
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Geneva
- UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, Geneva
- Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE ODIHR), Minsk
- Delegation of the European Union in Belarus
- Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament, Brussels
- International diplomatic community

About the Human Rights House Network (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.