

Mr. Alexander Lukashenko
President of the Republic of Belarus
Office of the President of the Republic of Belarus
E-mail: contact@president.gov.by
Fax: +375 17 226 06 10



**HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE
FOUNDATION**

Mr. Alexander Koniuk
Prosecutor General of the Republic of Belarus
E-mail: info@prokuratura.gov.by
Fax: +375 17 226 42 52

30 May 2012

Urgent call for immediate and unconditional release and for lifting the ungrounded travel ban of Belarusian human rights defender Aleh Volchak

Mr. President,

We, the undersigned members and partners of the Human Rights House Network, are deeply concerned about the recent arrest of the Belarusian human rights defender Aleh Volchak and the ongoing pressure against him and other human rights defenders in Belarus. We strongly believe that Aleh Volchak's detention is linked to his legitimate human rights work, including his latest publication about the deteriorating political situation in Belarus on the Internet on the eve of his arrest. We call upon the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Aleh Volchak, ensure his full rehabilitation and stop persecution of human rights defenders in connection with their professional activities.

On 24 May 2012, Aleh Volchak, a Belarusian human rights defender and the leader of the human rights organization Legal Aid to Population, was arrested by police in Minsk. On the same evening, the Central District Court in Minsk sentenced him to nine days of administrative arrest for petty hooliganism (Article 17.1 of the Belarusian Administrative Code).

On the eve of the detention, Aleh Volchak gave an interview expressing his opinion on the changes of the political situation in the country and calling for bringing all those involved in torture and cruel and inhuman treatment to justice.

The recent arrest of Aleh Volchak is a clear continuation of the ongoing pressure against him in Belarus. On 27 January 2012, he was arrested and accused of petty hooliganism and sentenced to four days of administrative arrest. On 12 March 2012, Aleh Volchak was informed that there was a temporary travel ban imposed on him. He was notified by the Ministry of Internal Affairs that the temporary travel ban was the result of information provided by the Ministry of Justice on the basis of a civil case taken against him. He was not given any details of the alleged civil case, and was advised to apply to the Ministry of Justice for further information. No information, however, was so far provided despite the requests made by Aleh Volchak.

As in January 2012, Aleh Volchak now serves his sentence in the Centre for the Isolation of Delinquents (CID) at the City Department of Internal Affairs of the Minsk City Executive Council located at Okrestina per. 36 in Minsk. Belarusian human rights defenders have repeatedly stated that detention conditions at CID are inhuman.

We consider the recent detention of Aleh Volchak as yet another example of the ongoing systematic pressure on human rights defenders, opposition and other civil society activists in Belarus. His case

clearly illustrates the persistent pattern in Belarus to silence critical voices and to perpetrate an environment of intimidation. Arbitrary detention is widely used to suppress persons who merely exercise their fundamental freedoms opinion and expression in Belarus.

We therefore remind the Belarusian authorities of their international obligation to promote and protect the right to freedom of expression and call upon them:

- **To immediately and unconditionally release Aleh Volchak and fully rehabilitate him;**
- **To immediately lift the ungrounded travel ban imposed on Aleh Volchak and fully ensure his right to freedom of movement, as well as travel bans on other human rights defenders, journalists and civil society and political leaders and activists;**
- **To take effective measures to protect human rights defenders and allow them to conduct their human rights work without hindrance, as provided in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders of 9 December 1998¹.**

Sincerely,

- Azerbaijan Human Rights House
 - Association for Protection of Women's Rights (APWR)
 - Azerbaijan Lawyers Association
 - Media Rights Institute
 - Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety
 - Legal Education Society
- Belarusian Human Rights House in exile (Vilnius)
- 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
 - Woman and Society Centre
- Human Rights House Zagreb
 - APEO/UPIM Association for Promotion of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities
 - Be Active Be Emancipated 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

¹ Article 12 of the Declaration

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N99/770/89/PDF/N9977089.pdf?OpenElement>

- Human Rights House Tbilisi
 - Article 42 of the Constitution
 - The Human Rights Centre Georgia (HRIDC)
 - The Georgian Center for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims – GCRT
- Human Rights House Oslo
 - Health and Human Rights Info
 - Human Rights House Foundation
 - Norwegian Burma Committee
 - Norwegian PEN
- Rafto Foundation, Norway
- Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland

- Armenian Helsinki Association
- Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor, Armenia
- Journalists' Club “Asparez” NGO, Armenia
- Public Information and Need of Knowledge NGO, Armenia
- Shahkhatun Women’s Democracy Promotion NGO, Armenia
- Institute for Peace and Democracy, Azerbaijan
- Human Rights Club, Azerbaijan
- Public Association for Assistance to Free Economy, Azerbaijan
- Belgrade Centre for Human Rights
- Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia
- Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights YUCOM, Serbia
- Civic Initiatives, Serbia
- Policy Center, Serbia
- Article 19, UK
- Index on Censorship, UK

Copies 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 Working Group on Arbitrary Detention
- Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE ODIHR), Warsaw
- 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 90 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, empower 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.