

PUBLIC APPEAL

Belarus

Chernobyl commemoration ends in large-scale arrests

Amnesty International considers anyone currently imprisoned for their peaceful observation or participation in actions in Minsk on 26 April in commemoration of the Chernobyl catastrophe to be prisoners of conscience and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

Amnesty International considers that the detention of people solely as a consequence of the peaceful exercise of their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and association is arbitrary detention and violates several rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the Belarusian government is bound under international law to respect.

On 26 April, the 19th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor catastrophe, a number of actions were organized in Minsk to commemorate the event under the name “*For future memory*”. One of the actions organized by opposition parties, including the United Civic Party of Belarus and the Belarusian National Front, had called on individuals to address President Lukashenka in a personal appeal starting with: *Greetings, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, I have a number of questions, to which you, according to current legislation are obliged to respond*. These included, amongst others, the demand not to restrict the opportunities for children from the area around Chernobyl to travel abroad. The organizers had requested participants to post or hand-deliver appeals in a special post-box near the presidential administration in Minsk at 18.00 on 26 April.

Around 16.30 members of Special Forces (*OMON*) started to block the entrance to the road leading to the special post-box, refusing entry to those who wanted to deliver their appeal. At 18.00 around 200 people, including members of affiliated political groups from Russia and Ukraine, as well as three priests from the banned Belarusian autocephalous Orthodox Church, had gathered near the presidential administration. When youth activists from Belarus, Ukraine and Russia unfurled banners, stating: “For your and our freedom” and “Today Ukraine, tomorrow Belarus” and started moving towards the building, members of *OMON* reportedly violently pushed a small group of people to the opposite side of the street. They surrounded them and reportedly started kicking and beating them with truncheons, followed by violently dragging people into police vans. A second group of people, including one of the organizers of a sanctioned demonstration on Bangalor square, leader of the United Civic Party of Belarus, Marina Bogdanovich, was arrested when a second attempt was made to reach the post-box. Later that evening, further arrests were made, including of Russian opposition members, two of which had reportedly just given interviews to Radio Free Europe.

In a separate incident, a 14-year-old boy, D.B¹, who had come to watch and was near the presidential administration, was reportedly severely ill-treated by members of *OMON*. He was wearing a t-shirt, with the slogan “Free Marinich” (referring to Prisoner of Conscience Mikhail Marinich), which apparently drew the attention of the *OMON*. As he was leaving, entering the entrance of the metro station near October Square, two members of the *OMON* grabbed him and pulled him into a police van, crushing his hand. In the police van he was reportedly insulted and threatened with physical force, and ordered to trample on the white-red-white Belarusian flag, which had been thrown on the floor. Two hours after his arrest an ambulance was called to the police station where he was held, when his mother arrived. Before leaving a police officer reportedly shook his injured hand with the words “Oh, has he injured his hand?”, after which the boy cried out in pain. At the hospital it was established that he had torn ligaments in his hand and he was given a cast.

On 27 April in several Minsk courts more than 30 people, including 14 Russians (including youth members of political parties “Yabloko” and Union of Right Forces), five Ukrainians and 13 Belarusians were handed down sentences of up to 15 days’ imprisonment or heavy fines for participating in or organizing an unsanctioned meeting. According to reports

¹ Name known to Amnesty International

the detainees were sentenced without legal representation or where appropriate, access to their respective consulates. The leader of the All-Ukrainian youth association "National Alliance", Igor Guts, who was sentenced to 10 days' imprisonment, had visible bruises as the result of reported ill-treatment. Others who received sentences of administrative detention included two Russian journalists, one working for the weekly *Russian Newsweek*, the other for the newspaper *Moskovski Komsomolets*. Both men were reporting on the commemoration of the Chernobyl catastrophe in Minsk.

TAKE ACTION NOW!

Urgent action is needed. Please write to the Belarusian authorities and call on them to:

- release all those currently detained for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association during the commemoration of the Chernobyl catastrophe;
- ensure the implementation of its international human rights obligations, including:
No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention (Article 9, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression (Article 19, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)
The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized (Article 21, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)
- initiate a prompt and independent investigation into the alleged ill-treatment of 14-year-old D.B, and bring those responsible for violations to justice.

Inform the Belarusian authorities that Amnesty International will continue to consider any demonstrators who are detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly as prisoners of conscience.

Please write appeals to:

1) President of the Republic of Belarus

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Karl Marx Str. 38
220016 g. Minsk
Belarus

Fax: +375 (172) 22 38 72
E-mail: pres@president.gov.by

or send a letter directly from his web-site:
www.president.gov.by/eng/president/mail.shtml

2) Minister of the Interior

Vladimir V. NAUMOV

Gorodskoi Val Str. 2
220050 g. Minsk
Belarus

Fax: +375 (172) 26 12 47
E-mail: miapress@nsys.by

3 Procutator General

Piotr MIKLASHEVICH

Internatsionalnaia Str. 22
220050 g. Minsk
Belarus

Fax: +375 (172) 26 41 66

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign to prevent and end grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote respect for all human rights. For more information see:
<http://www.amnesty.org>