



# Amnesty International Belarus: Public Appeal

14 August 2006, AI Index: EUR 49/012/2006

## Prisoners of Conscience: Mikalay Astreyka, Tsimafey Dranchuk, Enira Branizkaya, Alyaksandr Shalayka

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Mikalay Astreyka, Tsimafey Dranchuk, Enira Branizkaya, Alyaksandr Shalayka, members of the independent election monitoring group, Initiative Partnership, who the organization believes to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their human rights.

Following a trial, to which neither families nor journalists were given access, the four, who are all in their twenties, were sentenced on 4 August, according to Article 193, Part 2 of the Belarusian Criminal Code, for 'organizing and running an unregistered organization that infringes the rights of citizens'. The article was added to the Criminal Code in December 2005 as part of a series of amendments that introduced penalties for civil society organizations and other outspoken critics of the government, in the lead up to the presidential elections in March of this year. Mikalay Astreyka was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, Tsimafey Dranchuk to one year and Enira Branizkaya and Alyaksandr Shalayka to six months each. Enira Branizkaya and Alyaksandr Shalayka will be released on 21 August having served the full term of their sentences.

Mikalay Astreyka, Tsimafey Dranchuk, Enira Branizkaya and Alyaksandr Shalayka

There has been widespread condemnation of the sentences from the international community, including from ambassadors of several European Union countries. The Chairman-in-Office of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Belgian Foreign Minister Karel de Gucht commented that "All four have done nothing to merit imprisonment" and the European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner criticized the sentences and called for the immediate release of all four.

### Background

Mikalay Astreyka, Enira Branizkaya, Alyaksandr Shalayka, and Tsimafey Dranchuk were preparing to carry out independent monitoring of the presidential elections that were held on 19 March 2006 when they were arrested at their offices on 21 February 2006 by State Security Committee (KGB) officers. The KGB initially claimed that they were organizing fraudulent exit polls and planning a violent uprising after the election. They were formally charged on 3 March. Initiative Partnership carried out independent monitoring of the parliamentary elections in 2004 and had attempted to register as a non-governmental organization (NGO), but had been refused twice.

Amnesty International is concerned that this latest sentence reflects the systematic and ongoing campaign of obstruction, harassment and intimidation by the Belarusian authorities intended to stifle civil society activity within Belarus.

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

**Please send cards or letters of support and solidarity to Mikalay Astreyka and Tsimafey Dranchuk in prison. You can write in Belarusian, Russian, English or your own language. Your good wishes will be an invaluable source of support at this difficult time. Please send your greetings to:**

**Mikalay Astreyka, Tsimafey Dranchuk  
SIZO 1  
ul. Volodarskovo 2  
Minsk 220050  
Belarus**

**Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible to the Belarusian authorities, in Belarusian, Russian, English or your own language:**

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Mikalay Astreyka, Tsimafey Dranchuk, Enira Branizkaya, Alyaksandr Shalayka;
- reminding the Belarusian authorities of their obligations under articles 19, 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Belarus is a state party, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association;
- calling on the Belarusian authorities to immediately review laws, regulations and practices relating to the registration and activities of non-governmental organizations, particularly the Law on Public Associations adopted in August 2005;
- telling the Belarusian authorities to stop the obstruction, harassment and intimidation of civil society activists engaged directly or indirectly in the promotion and defence of human rights in Belarus.

### President

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**Salutation: Dear President Lukashenka**

### Procurator General

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**Salutation: Dear Procurator General**

### Minister of Internal Affairs

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**Salutation: Dear Minister**