

Update to Public Appeal

Belarus: Public Appeal. Prisoner of Conscience: Zmitser Dashkevich (AI Index: EUR 49/017/2006)

On 15 December 2006, an appeal made by the lawyer of Zmitser Dashkevich was refused by Minsk City Court and the original sentence of one and a half years' imprisonment was upheld. Local human rights groups had been hopeful that his sentence would be reduced.

On 7 December, Zmitser Dashkevich was transferred to a prison colony in Shklou, in the east of the country, where he will now serve the remainder of his sentence.

Amnesty International has received news from Zmitser Dashkevich, regarding the letters of support that he is receiving from members. Zmitser Dashkevich has asked colleagues to let Amnesty International know that he is very grateful for the demonstration of solidarity that members are showing. He said that it gives him huge moral support and that the prison administration, on seeing the hundreds of cards arriving, are treating him differently: with respect.

Your letters of support are making a difference!

- Please change the address for your solidarity actions and send all cards and messages of support for Zmitser Dashkevich to the following address:

Zmitser Dashkevich
IK No. 17
g. Shklou
Magileu Region 213004
Belarus

- Please continue sending letters to the Belarusian authorities, calling for Zmitser Dashkevich's immediate and unconditional release.

Background:

Zmitser Dashkevich was sentenced on 1 November to one and a half years' imprisonment in a minimum security prison. He was charged according to Article 193, Part 1 of the Belarusian Criminal Code, for 'organizing or participating in an activity of an unregistered non-governmental organization'. 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.

Amnesty International regards the continuing harassment and detention of opposition figures, and those involved in civil society activity, as a deliberate attempt by the authorities to intimidate and deter people from exercising their fundamental rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression. The result is the continued stifling of open, public debate and activity within Belarus.