

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### Ukraine: Arrested for requesting election results

Amnesty International is concerned that the authorities in Ukraine continue to arrest people who exercise their right to peacefully protest, following the sentencing of six people in the town of Sumy for demanding to know the results of presidential elections in their district.

"It is important that Ukraine demonstrate to the world that it respects the right to freedom of expression in the run up to the second round of presidential elections later this month," the organization said today.

The six sentenced were among a group of election monitors and members of the public who had gathered at a polling station in Sumy on the night of 31 October to ask for the results of the vote count for the presidential elections to be displayed according to the regulations. According to reports election officials refused to post the results and called the police. Ten people were charged on that night with insubordination to the police and were released shortly afterwards. Then on 13 November police detained all ten people again after going to their homes at 6am and in many cases taking them from their beds. Six of them were sentenced to 10 days' administrative detention according to the Code on Administrative Infringements. Lawyers and families of the accused were not admitted to the trial and were not told where the detainees were taken.

"There are strong indications that the six people have been arbitrarily arrested for exercising their right to freedom of expression," Amnesty International said.

"Authorities in Sumy have violated international standards by refusing to admit lawyers and families of the accused to the trial and by failing to inform them of the detainees' whereabouts."

Amnesty International considers everybody arrested for the peaceful expression of their views to be a prisoner of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

#### Background

The first round in the presidential elections in Ukraine were held on 31 October and resulted in a narrow win for the opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) criticized the conduct of the election campaign which was marked by overwhelmingly biased media coverage in favour of the government candidate Viktor Yanukovich. There were reports of pressure on voters to vote for particular candidates and irregularities at polling stations. The second round of the elections will be held on 21 November.

Viktor Yushchenko won the most number of votes in Sumy and it is alleged that the electoral commission was attempting to falsify the results and for that reason was reluctant to post the results. Family members, lawyers and members of the public, who had gathered outside the court on 13 November, were reportedly beaten and sprayed with tear gas when they attempted to stop police officers to ask where the detainees were being taken. Three members of the public were reportedly treated in hospital for chemical burns to the face. According to the Ministry of the Interior three policemen were also injured. A group of students are currently holding a hunger strike in the main square of Sumy to protest at the arrests.

Public Document

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