

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Moldova: Freedom of expression under attack**

Nine people in Moldova are at risk of being tried and sentenced for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly with one activist appearing in court this week. If they are sentenced to prison Amnesty International will consider them prisoners of conscience and will call for their immediate and unconditional release.

The nine members of the Moldovan non-governmental organization (NGO), Hyde Park, were arrested on 30 August at a demonstration in the capital, Chisinau, for which they had been granted permission. They were demanding the erection of a statue to the famous Romanian writer Liviu Rebreanu. However, a large number of police descended upon them and in 30 seconds all nine participants in the demonstration were forced into several police cars. Audio recordings made on a mobile phone during the arrest by one of the members of Hyde Park show no evidence that the demonstrators resisted the police or insulted them.

The demonstrators were detained for 40 hours in the badly ventilated cells at Buiucani district police station. During this time they were given nothing to eat or drink, were not provided with bedding and only had limited access to a toilet. A lawyer was present and asked to speak to them, but police officers turned down the request on the grounds that he had not yet drawn up a contract with the accused. In addition, police officers studied and deleted all photographic and video contents from the detainees' mobile phones without getting a court order.

"These nine people are going to be tried for the legitimate exercise of their rights to freedom of association and assembly," said Heather McGill, Amnesty International's researcher on Moldova.

"Their treatment by the police violates international human rights conventions that Moldova is party to."

In a letter to the General Prosecutor, Amnesty International has asked for the charges against the demonstrators relating to participation in or organization of an unsanctioned meeting to be dropped since Hyde Park had permission for the demonstration. The organization has also asked the General Prosecutor to examine the charges of resisting, and insulting police officers, and to investigate thoroughly the actions of the police officers in this case.

33-year old Oleg Brega is going to appear in court on 13 September 2006. He may be charged in connection with organizing an unsanctioned meeting in spite of a decision by the appeal court on 28 August granting them permission. Angela Lungu, Anatolie Juraveli, Roman Cotelia, Mariana Galescu, Sergiu Trocin, Anatol Hristea-Stan, Radu Vasilascu and Vitalie Dragan, between 18 and 50 years of age, were charged under Article 174 of the Administrative Code for participating in an unsanctioned meeting,

resisting the police and insulting police officers. They will be tried at the end of September and could face maximum prison sentences of 30 days or a fine.

### **Background**

Other recent events have also shown a lack of respect by the Moldovan authorities for freedom of expression. On 31 August, a signature collecting action organized jointly by Amnesty International Moldova with other NGOs as part of the Stop Violence against Women campaign was disrupted by police officers who tried to prevent the lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender organization GenderDoc-M from displaying their banner. The police claimed that GenderDoc-M carries out propaganda for homosexual lifestyles, and that the organization had not been named as an official participant in the action. The police eventually withdrew, but threatened to inform the Mayor of Chisinau that Amnesty International Moldova cooperates with GenderDoc-M, so that it can take this into consideration when giving permission for future actions.

The Mayor of Chisinau refused permission on April 28 to hold a Gay Pride rally in Chisinau on the grounds that religious groups had announced that they would organize protest actions if the rally went ahead.

### Public Document

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