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Belarus: Stifling the promotion of human rights

(Geneva) Human rights defenders are subject to a deliberate pattern of obstruction, harassment and intimidation by the Belarusian authorities to ultimately silence them, Amnesty International said today publishing its report *Belarus: Stifling the promotion of human rights*.

"On a daily basis human rights defenders in Belarus face obstacles in exercising their rights to freedom of association and assembly as well as violations of their right to receive and impart information about human rights," Amnesty International said.

A disturbing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), directly and indirectly engaged in the promotion and defence of human rights in Belarus, have been closed on the basis of controversial legislation and regulations, widely considered as restrictive, by a judiciary whose independence has been repeatedly called into question by the international community. None of the organizations that have been closed down or people who have been arbitrarily detained or fined were able to appeal successfully in court.

"As more and more organizations are closed down, human rights defenders will be targeted on a personal basis, as they are no longer part of recognized, 'registered' organizations", Amnesty International said.

Restrictions on the freedom of expression have not been favourable for the promotion of human rights and civil liberties. Access to most media is therefore increasingly not available to human rights defenders, including independent trade union activists. Raising awareness about human rights and disseminating information about alleged human rights violations in Belarus has become increasingly difficult.

"A next target seems to be internet-based publications, one of the only media outlets currently able to function more or less independently, Amnesty International warned.

"We call on the Belarusian government to adhere to the principles of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders."

The publication of the report *Belarus: Stifling the promotion of human rights* comes at a time when the human rights situation in Belarus is under consideration by the UN Commission on Human Rights

which is convening for its 60th session in Geneva 15 March - 23 April. Amnesty International calls on the Commission to urge the Belarusian authorities to:

- end harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders;
- undertake an immediate review of laws, regulations and administrative practices relating to the registration and activities of NGOs;
- end the practice of detaining people solely for the peaceful exercise of their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and association;
- cooperate fully with the human rights mechanisms of the UN, including through issuing a standing invitation to the Special Procedures of the Commission.

The publication of this report marks the start of Amnesty International's web action to stop the silencing of human rights defenders:

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/blr-290304-action-eng> English

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/blr-290304-action-fra> French

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/blr-290304-action-esl> Spanish

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/blr-290304-action-ara> Arabic

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