



Date : Wednesday 5 October 2011

**Inhuman treatment and threats to the lives of Belarusian
political prisoners must stop!**

<http://www.fidh.org/Inhuman-treatment-and-threats-to>

FIDH - Worldwide Human Rights Movement

Paris-Minsk, 4 October 2011 - International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organisation in Belarus, Human Rights Center "Viasna", strongly condemn the inhuman treatment of political prisoners in Belarusian prisons. Reliable sources indicate that psychological and physical pressure continues on political prisoners still in detention in Belarus, including death threats, unjustified transfers and appalling health care provision.

Death threats and unjustified transfers

Former presidential candidate Andrei Sannikau, sentenced to 5 years imprisonment on 1 May 2011, has been subjected to constant psychological and physical pressure from Belarusian prison authorities. Between 20th and 30th September, Sannikau was transferred from the Navapolatsk penal colony to the Babruisk colony via two transit detention centers: No. 2 in Vitebsk and No. 4 in Mahilou. During this transfer Sannikau was forced to go for periods without food and sleep, or access to his lawyers. His family had no knowledge of his whereabouts. Sannikau only managed to meet with his lawyers in Mahilou detention center on 26 September. At this meeting Sannikau informed his lawyer that a fellow detainee at the center had warned him that he could be killed during the transfer to, or upon arrival in, Babruisk. Consequently, he strongly opposed the transfer unless his security could be guaranteed. Sannikau was nevertheless forcibly transferred to Babruisk on 30 September. He was reportedly asked by authorities why he doesn't simply ameliorate his situation by signing a pardon letter to the President of Belarus.

Zmitster Dashkevich, leader of the 'Young Front' youth movement, shared a cell with Andrei Sannikau in Mahilou detention center No. 4. Dashkevich, sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment on 24 March 2011, has also suffered a number of unjustified transfers. He was moved from penal colony No. 9 in Horki, where he had started a hunger strike in protest against miserable confinement conditions, to Hlybokae, via Vitebsk and Mahilou detention centers. Having seen Dashkevich in Mahilou, Sannikau informed his lawyers that Dashkevich was dramatically weakened, both physically and mentally. Dashkevich too received death threats through a co-detainee sharing the Mahilou cell, who informed him that he was likely to be murdered upon arrival at the Hlybokae penal colony.

During transfers, psychological pressure is very high; nontransparent and unjustified transfers can be assimilated to inhuman treatment. FIDH and Viasna condemn the secrecy and coercion with which these transfers have been conducted. They fear that the death threats against Sannikau and Dashkevich are part of a deliberate strategy of intimidation in light of the international community's efforts to secure the unconditional release of political prisoners.

Denial of adequate health care

Moreover, on 30 August, Dzmitry Bandarenka, an Andrei Sannikau campaign activist, was transferred despite suffering from a post operative complication in the form of an abscess. The move took place in total secrecy from the detention facility in Valadarski street to penal colony No. 15 in Mahilou. This transfer was extremely dangerous for Bandarenka who had just undergone spine surgery to remove a hernia paralyzing his right leg in early August. Bandarenka's requests for medical assistance since February 2011 were ignored by authorities until this June. On 17 August, two weeks after his operation, Bandarenka was discharged from Minsk hospital No. 5 and sent back to the Interior Ministry's detention facility in Valadarski Street without the necessary rehabilitation. Bandarenka's current health, including the abscess on his leg, does not allow him to sit down. As lying down during the day time is prohibited in detention, Bandarenka is forced to endure whole days of standing. Notably, on 20 June, one third of Bandarenka's prison term expired, triggering a petition under Article 91 of the Criminal Code requesting the substitution of his punishment for milder one. The petition was denied. Bandarenka's wife has almost no news on the actual condition of her husband.

Very little information is available on the conditions of other political detainees. Former presidential candidate, Mikalai Statkevich, sentenced to 6 years in a high-security colony on 26 May, is reportedly held in Shklou penal colony. His wife, Maria Adamovich, reports having had no news from him for over three weeks.

Furthermore, Ales Bialiatski, FIDH Vice-President and Chairman of HRC "Viasna", arrested on 4 August 2011 will reportedly stand trial before the end of this month. Despite close to 1000 moral cautions signed, the preventive measures remain in place, and he is awaiting trial in prison. From the outset of his detention, his family was denied visiting rights and his colleagues fear that a closed trial will be organised to prevent independent observation.

Pressure on, and ill-treatment of, political prisoners in Belarus has been repeatedly condemned by international bodies - most recently by EU representatives during their last Eastern Partnership Summit, in Warsaw on 29-30 September.

FIDH and Human Rights Center "Viasna" strongly emphasize that the life and health of detainees is not a matter for political negotiation. "The reported treatment of imprisoned activists in Belarus is simply intolerable", declared Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President.

FIDH and Viasna call for:

the unconditional and immediate release of all the political prisoners and their full rehabilitation, including Viasna vice-president, Ales Bialiatski; the rehabilitation and reinstatement of lawyers who lost their practise licenses for performing their professional duty; and the cessation of all further acts of political persecution.

Only these improvements, and changes to the legislation currently used by Belarusian authorities to silence any critical voice, can form the basis for continued political and economic dialogue in Belarus.

"We are deeply concerned that Belarusian authorities despite the release of some of political prisoners, continue to reinforce their repressive arsenal", states Souhayr Belhassen : "The Belarusian Parliament's approval of amendments to the Belarusian Code of Administrative Offences on 3 October 2011 - amendments establishing criminal responsibility not only for non-sanctioned actions, but even for mass inactivity, in the Code's article on public events - illustrates the State's desire (to point of total absurdity) to prevent any attempt of free expression. Only substantive changes in this tendency can be considered a guarantee that the situation will truly change."