



HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE
FOUNDATION

Mr. Alexander Lukashenko
President of the Republic of Belarus
Email: contact@president.gov.by
Fax: +375 17 226 06 10

20 December 2010

Mr. President,

We, partners of the Human Rights House Network, strongly condemn the crackdown on demonstrators, arrests and beatings of journalists, human rights defenders and opposition candidates, which happened in the aftermath of the Presidential elections on 19 December 2010 in Belarus. Furthermore, we are concerned about the possible OMON (special task force) violent suppression of the peaceful protest actions, which may continue in the coming days.

Thousands of Belarusian citizens gathered at the Independence Square in Minsk on Sunday to protest against the violations observed during the election process. The Belarusian authorities violently dispersed the demonstration and used disproportionate force against the demonstrators, opposition presidential candidates and journalists performing their professional duties. The violent dispersal of the demonstration is a direct violation of the right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression guaranteed under Articles 21 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by the Republic of Belarus.

Hundreds were beaten, including the presidential candidates Vladimir Nekliaev, Vital Rymasheuski and Andrei Sannikov. According to official information, **more than 600 people were arrested**. Seven of the ten presidential candidates were detained, while the eighth candidate, Vladimir Nekliaev, was kidnapped from the hospital by civilian men. Many closed administrative trials against demonstrators and criminal cases against the presidential candidates and members of their official teams have been started. Dozens are already sentenced to 10-15 days imprisonment. We are also concerned about the human rights defender Aleh Hulak, head of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, who was arrested and his whereabouts are still not confirmed.

Moreover, at around 3 am on 20 December, officers of the Ministry of Interior and persons believed to be from the KGB raided the offices of Charter 97 and the Human Rights Centre Viasna. Ten persons in the office at the time were detained and documentation and equipment were confiscated. At around 7 am, some unidentified persons in civilian clothing attempted to break into the offices of the same organisation. Human Rights Center Viasna, one of the members of the Human Rights House Network, was engaged in non-partisan election observation, seeking to ensure that Belarusian citizens can exercise their right "to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections" as guaranteed by Article 25 (b) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The police raids at Charter 97 and the Human Rights Center Viasna are an illustration of systematic suppression and persecution of human rights defenders and journalists in Belarus, despite the Belarusian state's obligations to respect and promote human rights and promises to meet the European Union requirements. The actions against the Human Rights Centre Viasna restrict the right of human rights defenders "to seek the protection and realization of human rights at the national and international levels" as guaranteed by the United Nations Declaration on the Right and

Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (UN Declaration of Human Rights Defenders).

We, therefore, call upon you to:

- Immediately release the journalists and human rights defenders and stop further persecution of those arrested for peaceful expression of their opinion;
- Immediately release the presidential candidates and demonstrators;
- Stop the use of violence against the demonstrators, impartially investigate the incidents and bring the perpetrators of violence to justice;
- Ensure that there is no administrative charges against or illegitimate pre-trial detention of peaceful demonstrators, human rights defenders and journalists;
- Ensure fair criminal trials in accordance with the international standards;
- Ensure that the Belarusian people can safely exercise their civil and political rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and the international treaties such as the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights to which Belarus is a signatory;
- Ensure that human rights defenders can operate safely in Belarus without harassment and persecution as guaranteed in the UN Declaration of Human Rights Defenders.

Sincerely,

Belarusian Human Rights House in exile in Vilnius, Lithuania

- Belarus Watch
- Several human rights organizations in Belarus

Russian Research Center for Human Rights (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Human Rights Network Group
- Independent Psychiatric Association of Russia
- Moscow Centre for Prison Reform
- Moscow Helsinki Group
- Mother's Right Foundation
- Non-violence International
- Right of the Child
- Right to Live and have Civil Dignity
- Social Partnership Foundation
- Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia

Youth Human Rights Movement (the Russian Federation)

Human Rights House Baku (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Association for the Protection of Women's Rights in Azerbaijan after D. Aliyeva (APWR)
- Legal Education Society
- Media Rights Institute
- Women's Association for Rational Development (WARD)

Human Rights House Tbilisi (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Article 42 of the Constitution
- The Caucasian Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Studies (CAUCASIA)
- The Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT)

- The Human Rights Centre (HRIDC)
- Union 'Saphari' – Family Without Violence

Armenian Helsinki Association

Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union

Human Rights House Sarajevo (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Association of Female Citizens "Renaissance"
- Foundation CURE
- Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Regional Co-ordinator for Youth Groups
- Serb Civic Council - Movement for Equality - The Council of the Sarajevo Canton
- Woman and Society Centre

Human Rights House Zagreb (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- APEO/UPIM – Association for Promotion of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities
- B.a.B.e.
- CMS - Centre for Peace Studies
- Documenta - Centre for Dealing with the Past
- GOLJP - Civic Committee for Human Rights
- Svitanje - Association for Protection and Promotion of Mental Health

Human Rights House Skopje (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Association for Democratic Initiatives (ADI)
- The First Children's Embassy in the World – "Megjashi"
- Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia
- Macedonian Women's Rights Centre (MWRC) - Shelter Centre
- Polio Plus – Movement Against Disability

Open Word House, London (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Index on Censorship
- Article 19

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)

Human Rights House Oslo (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Health and Human Rights Info
- Human Rights House Foundation
- Norwegian Burma Committee
- Norwegian Helsinki Committee
- Norwegian Tibet Committee
- Norwegian PEN

The Rafto Foundation for Human Rights (Norway)

Civic Belarus, Czech Republic

Civil Rights Defenders, Sweden

PEN International

Copies have been sent to:

- The Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Geneva
- The UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Geneva
- The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE ODIHR), Warsaw
- The Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Belarus
- The Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament, Brussels
- The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs of the Norwegian Parliament
- The Norwegian Embassy in Kiev
- The Norwegian delegation to OSCE
- The Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The Mission of the Republic of Belarus to the UN Office at Geneva
- The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders

About the Human Rights House Network (www.humanrightshouse.org)

The Human Rights House Network is a forum of cooperation between established and emerging Human Rights Houses, uniting 70 NGOs in 15 countries in Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, East and Horn of Africa, and Western Europe. HRHN's aim is to protect, strengthen and support human rights defenders and their organizations. The Human Rights House Foundation, based in Oslo (Norway) and Geneva (Switzerland), is the secretariat of the Human Rights House Network.