

STATEMENT

International NGOs stand up for human rights in Belarus

ARTICLE 19

Joint statement of 19 non-governmental organisations

International NGOs organized street actions across Europe to stand up for human rights in Belarus on 19 December 2011. Joint actions by NGOs will take place in London, Zurich, Prague, Berlin, Stockholm and Amsterdam. Groups of Young European Federalists across Europe have also organised protests.

One year after the 2010 presidential elections Belarus finds itself in the most alarming human rights crisis since the country became an independent state 20 years ago. The situation with human rights in the country has never been worse and continues to deteriorate.

An unprecedented wave of repression started immediately on 19 of December 2010, the day of election, when an estimated 40,000 people took part in a demonstration in Minsk, which was brutally dispersed by riot police. More than 700 people were detained, among them 7 presidential candidates.

In spring 2011 more than 30 people were sentenced to prison terms in propaganda trials. From August to October 25 political prisoners were released. During the year, the Belarusian KGB has detained and interrogated opposition activists, journalists and human rights defenders, and searched many of their apartments and offices. From April to July 2011 so

called “silent protests“ have taken place across Belarus. Most of these demonstrations were dispersed by the police and altogether over 1,700 participants were detained and either fined or subject to up to 15 days of administrative arrest.

Based on information of Belarusian human rights organisations at the moment at least 11 people are detained for political reasons in Belarus. These prisoners of conscience are Ihar Alinevich, Mikalai Autukhovich, Dzmitry Bandarenka, Ales Bialiatski, Dzmitry Dashkevich, Mikalai Dziadok, Aliaksandr Frantskevich, Eduard Lobau, Andrei Sannikau, Pavel Seviarynets and Mikalai Statkevich.

We urge President Lukashenka to release all political prisoners in Belarus immediately and unconditionally and to stop the persecution, harassment and intimidation of dissidents immediately! Furthermore, all those prosecuted for political reasons in Belarus must be fully rehabilitated.

On 30 November 2011 Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzslau Kavalyou were found guilty of a series of bomb attacks in Belarus and sentenced to death by the Belarusian Supreme Court, leaving no recourse for appeal other than for clemency to the President, in violation of international law. Their trial failed to meet international standards. There are allegations that they were tortured and ill-treated in order to obtain a confession.

We therefore appeal to President Lukashenka to grant clemency to Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzslau Kavalyou and to establish an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty in Belarus.

On 17 December 2011 the fourth Constituent Congress of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party (BCD) has taken place in Minsk. The BCD has attempted to gain legal status as a political party in Belarus already three times in 2009 and 2010. But the Belarusian authorities denied state registration everytime.

There are several cases of other political parties and NGOs being closed or

denied registration in the past similar to the BCD case. Civic organizations whose applications for registration have been turned down since 2010 include: youth organisation Malady Front, the Assembly of Pro-Democratic Non-Governmental Organisations, an independent trade union “Razam”, human rights organisation Brestskaya Viasna”, civic youth association „Maladaya Backaushchyna”, civic association „Gavary Praudu”, the Belarusian branch of the International Helsinki Association of Human Rights, civic association „Spadchyna”, and civic association „Zalaty Leu”.

We urge President Lukashenka to register democratic parties and non-governmental organisations in a fair, impartial and transparent manner.

1. Article 19, United Kingdom
2. Association Human Rights in Belarus, Germany
3. Belarusian Human Rights House, Lithuania
4. Belarus Watch, Lithuania
5. Civic Belarus, Czech Republic
6. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, South Africa
7. CODAP, Switzerland
8. German-Belarusian Association, Germany
9. German-Schwiss PEN Center, Switzerland
0. Index on Censorship, United Kingdom
1. Initiative “Belarus in Action!”, Netherlands
2. ISHR - International Society for Human Rights, Germany
3. Libereco – Partnership for Human Rights, Germany
4. NESEHNUTI (Independent Social Ecological Movement), Czech Republic
5. Östgruppen – Swedish Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights,

Sweden

6. People in Need, Czech Republic
7. Service Civil International, Switzerland
8. Reporters Without Borders, Switzerland
9. Young European Federalists, Belgium