

Alena Kupchyna, Ambassador
Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in Budapest
Agárdi út 3/B
1126 Budapest, Hungary

Ljubljana, 20 July 2012

Arrest of peaceful anti-nuclear activists in Minsk

Dear Ms. Kupchyna,

In Umanotera, Slovenian foundation for sustainable development we were deeply concerned to learn that four peaceful anti-nuclear activists have been arrested on 18 July 2012 in Minsk while non-violently exercising their basic human right to petition the government. Russian citizen, nuclear physicist and journalist Andrey Ozharkovskiy and Belarussian citizens journalist Tatjana Novikova, head of the environmental organisation EcoDom Irina Sukhy and human rights monitor Michael Matskevich were arrested when they prepared to hand over a petition to the Russian Embassy expressing their concerns about the construction and operation of a new nuclear power station near Astravetz. We understand that three of the four are still being detained and that the fourth had to pay a punitive fine in order to be released.

There are many concerns among Belarussian and Russian citizens as well as the international community in Europe and globally about nuclear power after the catastrophe in Chernobyl in 1986 and the recent nuclear accident in Fukushima. Expression of those concerns is an absolutely legitimate right and can help political decision makers come to a decision that reduces the chances of such accidents happening again. Their activities fall well within the limits of freedom of expression of opinion as defined in article 10 of the European Charter on Human Rights, and article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights of the United Nations. Furthermore, the Aarhus Convention (the 1998 UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters), to which the Republic of Belarus has been a Party since the year 2000, explicitly states in article 3(8) that those exercising their rights under the Convention are not to be penalized, persecuted or harassed in any way for their involvement.

Finally, we note that the wide publicity that these arrests are generating around Europe and the world are eroding Belarussia's credibility as a state governed by the rule of law.

Therefore, we appeal to the Belarussian government to immediately arrange for the release of Andrey Ozharkovskiy, Tatjana Novikova and Michael Matskevich and to drop the charges against all four citizens.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Vida Ogorelec".

Vida Ogorelec
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cc:

- Mr Ernest Aljančič, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Belarus in Slovenia
- Mr Karl Erjavec, Slovenian Minister of foreign affairs