

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

BELARUS: As the trial of Ales Bialiatski opens on November 2, the Observatory denounces it as staged by the authorities

Paris-Geneva, October 28, 2011. The trial of Mr. Ales Bialiatski, President of the “Viasna” Centre for the Defence of Human Rights and Vice-President of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) will open in Minsk on Wednesday, November 2, 2011 at 10:00 am. The case will be heard by the Pervomaiskoe District Court of Minsk, under Presiding Judge Sergey Bondarenko. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), denounces this act of judicial harassment against him.

Charged with tax evasion, or “concealment of profits on an especially large scale”, Mr. **Ales Bialiatski** has been detained since August 4, 2011 at the preventive detention centre No. 1 in Minsk. Criminal proceedings against him were filed on the basis of information provided to the Belarusian authorities by the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice and Attorney General of Poland, concerning accounts opened in Mr. Bialiatski’s name in foreign banks.

Prepared long ago by the Belarusian judiciary, the indictment exposes him to a possible sentence of seven years in prison and confiscation of property (including the flat where the offices of Viasna, his organisation, are located).

“Ales Bialiatski is the victim of arbitrary detention and judicial harassment because of his commitment to democracy and human rights. It is feared that, in the prevailing climate of repression in Belarus since the elections in late 2010, the authorities are doing everything they can to make this an “exemplary” trial to silence any dissenting voice”, said Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President.

“We condemn this trial, staged by the Belarusian authorities to stop his activities in defence of human rights, and those of his organisation, Viasna. We call once again, forcefully, for his immediate and unconditional release”, added Gerald Staberock, OMCT Secretary General.

The Observatory is all the more concerned that Mr. Ales Bialiatski's mail correspondence with his friends and relatives has been hindered. The latter has also only been allowed to receive visits by his lawyer, and his wife received today an official refusal to visit her husband in jail.

Since his arrest in August 2011, international human rights organisations, numerous democratic States and the European Union have called for the release of Mr. Ales Bialiatski.

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