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We, 38 undersigned organizations from 16 countries, condemn the continuing repressions against civil society in Belarus and the recent arrests of peaceful demonstrators. We call upon the Belarusian authorities immediately to stop harassment of those who exercise their rights to freedom of assembly and expression, release the demonstrators from prisons and stop preventive detentions of journalists, human rights defenders and civic and political activists.

In the past two months, civic activists have been organizing silent protests across Belarus. Hundreds of demonstrators have gathered on the streets across the country in order to protest peacefully against the deteriorating political and economic situation in Belarus. Since 15 June 2011, at least 1730 people have been arrested during the peaceful demonstrations in the country.

On 15 June 2011, at least **240** demonstrators, including several journalists, were detained by the Belarusian police, as several thousand individuals took part in a peaceful demonstration across Belarus. Police reportedly used violence against the demonstrators.

On 22 June 2011, over **460** people were arrested during another silent protest in Belarus. Minsk police detained 220 protesters, including several journalists, foreign nationals and David Emtestam, the first secretary of Swedish embassy in Belarus, who was later released. Many detainees were charged with disorderly conduct (Article 17.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Republic of Belarus).

On 29 June 2011, the Belarusian riot police violently dispersed peaceful silent protests and arrested **250** demonstrators across the country. Minsk protesters were detained by plain-clothes men, who did not present any police badges or other insignia. People were seized in the streets and dragged to prepared buses without number plates.¹ Following trials, most of the detainees were fined. Several demonstrators were sentenced to administrative detention from 9 to 15 days. Similar trials were held in the regions of Homel, Brest, Zhodzina and Salihorsk.

According to some of the defendants, the arrests and the trials were accompanied by multiple human rights violations by the police, including violence against peaceful protesters, lack of information on charges during the arrest and the absence of identification by police during protests.

Shortly after the demonstrations of 29 June, five activists and journalists reportedly received threats of arrest from unidentified individuals for possible participation in another peaceful silent protest in Minsk on **3 July 2011**, on the Independence Day of Belarus. A civil activist received the same threats in Brest. Despite the threats, hundreds of people gathered in the streets of Minsk and several other cities. At least **310** peaceful protesters, including journalists, minors and a pregnant woman, were detained in different parts of Belarus, including Minsk (over 160 detained), Baranavichy, Homel, Hrodna, Mahiliou, Smaliavichy, Vitsebsk and Zhlobin. Police used teargas and pepper spray during the arrests, and used violence against peaceful demonstrators. More than 50 arrested protesters were brought to trial on administrative charges for disorderly conduct. Some were fined or sentenced to up to 15 days of administrative detention, while others are awaiting trial.

On 6 July 2011, more than **400** participants of silent protests, including at least 28 journalists, were arrested across the country, including in Minsk and in the regions of Brest, Homel, Hrodna, Mahiliou, and Vitsebsk. In several places the protesters were detained by plain-clothes individuals who did not identify themselves to the detainees. At least 150 detainees were brought to trial on administrative charges before 9 July 2011, most of them sentenced to up to 15 days of administrative detention.

Among the demonstrators given administrative detention over the last week were at least five human rights defenders: on 29 June 2011 Aliaksei Lapitski from Zhodzina was detained and sentenced to 5 days in prison; on 3 July 2011 Valery Shchukin from Minsk, Barys Bukhel from Mahiliou and Anatoli Paplauny from Homel were detained and sentenced to 5-, 7 days and 15 days of imprisonment respectively.

¹<http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/16641.html>

Harsh treatment of peaceful protesters and dispersal of demonstrations are clear violations of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. These rights are guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Articles 19 and 21 respectively, to which Belarus is a party. We point out that under international legal standards, no restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and that are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

The right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are also established in the Belarusian Constitution, in Articles 33 and 35.

We, therefore, call upon the Belarusian authorities to:

- **Immediately release all detained peaceful protesters, exercising their lawful right to freedom of expression and of assembly;**
- **Immediately discontinue the use of administrative charges against or illegitimate pretrial detention of peaceful demonstrators, human rights defenders and journalists;**
- **Ensure and respect the right to freedom of expression and of assembly to all Belarusian citizens, including human rights defenders, civic activists and the political opposition;**
- **Ensure that journalists are able fully to exercise their professional duties, including during peaceful demonstrations;**
- **Ensure compliance with the recently adopted UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Belarus of 15 June 2011, which calls on the Belarusian government to stop harassment of civil society and ensure the right to freedom of assembly.²**

Undersigning organizations:

All-Ukrainian Youth NGO "Foundation of Regional Initiatives" (Ukraine)
Armenian Helsinki Association (Armenia)
Belarusian Human Rights House in exile in Vilnius, (Lithuania)
Belarusian Tribunal (Netherlands)
Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
Civic Belarus (Czech Republic)
Civil Rights Defenders (Sweden)
CODAP Youth Resource Centre on Human Rights (Switzerland)
European Exchange (Germany)
Federation for Social Defence - BSV (Germany)
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)
Human Rights Center "Postup"(Ukraine)

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

- Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan (AHRC)
- Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS)
- Legal Education Society
- Media Rights Institute

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

- Health and Human Rights Info
- Human Rights House Foundation
- Norwegian Helsinki Committee
- Norwegian PEN
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Human Rights House Tbilisi (Georgia) (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- The Human Rights Centre (HRIDC)
- Article 42 of the Constitution

² <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/LTD/G11/141/66/PDF/G1114166.pdf?OpenElement>

Human Rights House Zagreb (Croatia) (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

International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) (Germany)
International Youth Human Rights Movement, (Russian Federation)
Libereco – Partnership for Human Rights (Germany)

Open Word House (United Kingdom) (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Article 19
- Index on Censorship

People in Need (Czech Republic)
Promo-LEX Association (Republic of Moldova)

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

- Moscow Helsinki Group

The Rafto Foundation for Human Rights (Norway)
Swiss German PEN Centre (Switzerland)
Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (Ukraine)
Young European Federalists (Belgium)

Copies sent to:

- The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE ODIHR), Warsaw
- The Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, Geneva
- UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Geneva
- UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Geneva