



HELŚIŃSKA FUNDACJA PRAW CZŁOWIEKA
HELSINKI FOUNDATION for HUMAN RIGHTS

RADA FUNDACJI

Halina Bortnowska-Dąbrowska
Jerzy Ciemniewski
Janusz Grzelak
Marek Antoni Nowicki
Marek Safjan
Stefan Starczewski

ZARZĄD FUNDACJI

Prezes: Danuta Przywara
Wiceprezes: Zbigniew Hołda
Sekretarz: Adam Bodnar
Skarbnik: Elżbieta Czyż
Członek Zarządu: Janina A. Kłosowska

Warsaw, 3 April 2008

L. dz. 1228/08

Mr. Alyaksandr Lukashenka

President of the Republic of Belarus

Mr. Alyaksandr Lukashenka

220016, ul. Karla Marxa 38, Minsk

Fax: +375 172 26 06 10 / +375 172 22 38 72

Mr. Miklashevich P.P

The General Prosecutor's Office
of the Republic of Belarus

220050 Internacjonalnaja 22, Minsk

Tel. +375 17 2264360; 2264358

Mr. Naimov, V.V

The Ministry for Internal Affairs

220050 ul. Gorodskoi Val. 4, Minsk

The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights condemns the arrests and brutal attacks by riot police of peaceful demonstrators in Minsk. We especially condemn the arrests of journalists covering the event, and the ongoing harassment of independent media and individual journalists.

On 25 March thousands of Belarusians came to Minsk to take part in a peaceful demonstration dedicated to the 90th anniversary of Belarusian Democratic Republic. The riot police used brutal force against the peaceful participants. More than 100 were detained. Among them were correspondents from Lithuania and citizens from Poland and Ukraine.

Andrej Liankevich, photojournalist of *Nasha Niva*, was brutally beaten and arrested by riot police on 25 March. The photojournalist Andrej Liankevich's case was submitted to the judge Alena Lapceva of the Zavadskoj district, Minsk. The trial started March 26, but case was returned to the Police Office (Savecki RUUS) by the judge "for completion the case with documents stating accusations" on March 27. Another journalist of *Nasha Niva*, Sjamien

Pechanko, was arrested and sentenced to 15 days arrest by the Court of Maskouski City District, Minsk. They were both charged with violating the order of organizing and holding mass events (Art. 23.24 Code of the administrative offences). The journalists were detained despite the fact that they were covering the rally.

We regret to say that Belarusian state authorities do not recognize the role and the rights of journalists, who report from ongoing events in Belarus. We condemn the practice of the Belarusian judiciary, which do not acquit journalists, when it obvious that there is no legal basis for the cases.

After the demonstration on 25 March, 75 administrative cases were brought to court against the participants. According to the police reports, they were charged with violating the order of organizing and holding mass events, by participating in a demonstration, not authorized by Minsk authorities. As a result of the trials, 26 people were sentenced to short jail terms of 5-15 days, over 50 people were fined.

20 people were traumatized with different types of injuries caused by police violence. Activists Andrei Babitski, Zmister Dashkevich, Artur Finkevich and Mikita Shutsiankou were all severely beaten. Even an under age girl, Alena Makarevich, was severely beaten in the Partyzanski police department.

We are very concerned about reports that on 27 March, KGB started a countrywide search in the offices and apartments of independent mass media and their journalists. The searches were taking place in the apartments of the journalists Eduard Mielnikau, Anatol Hatochyts (Homiek), Alena Stsiapanava, (Vitsiebsk), Tamara Shchapiotkina (Biaroza), Hienadz Sudnik (Mahileu) as well as in the editorial office of Radio Racyja in Minsk.

The KGB representatives were presenting search warrants, signed by legal investigators from Minsk City Public Prosecutor's Office. According to the Belarusian Association of Media, in the orders it was stated that the searches were carried out with regards to breaches of article 367 of Belarus' Criminal Code ("Libel in Relation to the President of Belarus").

This action shows that the Belarusian state does not accept the existence of independent media and civil society. We consider this a grave violation of article 19 of the UN Covenant

on Civil and Political Rights. We fully support the efforts of the Belarusian Association of Journalists protecting journalists and defending the freedom of expression.

We expect that Belarusian authorities will stop the current oppression of Belarusian media and journalists. We demand the immediate release of all citizens arrested during the peaceful demonstration. We also expect the Belarusian authorities to hold an independent investigation against the police officers guilty of human rights violations in connection to the events that took place on 25 of March 2008 - Independence Day.



Danuta Przywara

President of the Board
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights