



Belarus: Judicial harassment of Leanid Sudalenka, president of the Gomel branch of the NGO "Legal Initiative"

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Raids /

Judicial harassment

Belarus

January 7, 2021

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a partnership of FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in **Belarus**.

Description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by the Human Rights Center "Viasna" about the judicial harassment of **Leanid Sudalenka**, lawyer of the Homie? (Gomel) branch of the HRC "Viasna". Mr. Sudalenka works on documenting human rights violations and has helped Belarusian citizens to prepare over 84 individual complaints to the UN Human Rights Committee. Leanid Sudalenka is a laureate of the 2018 "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" Human Rights Prize of the French Republic.

On January 5, 2021, officers of the Main Department for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus searched Leanid Sudalenka's office, located in the Public Political Center "Polesskaya, 52". The officers had a warrant, and the search was connected to a criminal case opened earlier in December 2020 against a Homie? opposition activist Mr. Uladzimir Nepomniashchykh[1], where Leanid Sudalenka is figuring as a witness.

The search lasted for about 10 hours, and the officials confiscated 304 items, including Leanid Sudalenka's laptop and bank cards. The officers also seized documents related

to administrative cases and complaints of protesters and white-red-white flags. The same evening, another search was conducted in his apartment.

After the search in the office, Leanid Sudalenka was taken to the Office for Combating Organized Crime for an interrogation as a witness in the above-mentioned criminal case. However, Leanid Sudalenka notes that during the interrogation he was asked about his legal and other assistance to people who had been detained, fined and arrested during the post-electoral protests in Homie?. In addition, during the search, the officials predominantly inquired about information, data carriers and bank cards.

The Observatory expresses its utmost concern over the searches and the interrogation of Mr. Sudalenka, which seem to be connected to his legitimate activities as a human rights lawyer.

The Observatory further condemns the persecution of other Belarus human rights defenders, including **Maria Rabkova** - volunteer coordinator of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna", FIDH member organization in Belarus - who is facing between six months and three years in prison for her legitimate human rights work on the absurd grounds of "educating or preparing people to participate in mass riots".

The Observatory urges the Belarusian authorities to stop harassment and judicial persecution of Leanid Sudalenka and other human rights defenders, including Maria Rabkova, and immediately and unconditionally release and drop all charges against those detained.

Actions requested:

Please write to the authorities of Belarus to urge them to:

i. Put an end to all acts of harassment - including at the judicial level - against Leanid Sudalenka and all other human rights defenders in Belarus, and ensure in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate activities without any hindrance and fear of reprisals;

ii. Immediately and unconditionally release Maria Rabkova, since her detention is arbitrary and the criminal charges against her seem to be merely aimed at punishing her for her legitimate human rights activities, as well as all other human rights defenders in Belarus.

Addresses:

- Mr. Aliaksandr Lukashenka, President of Belarus, Email: contact@president.gov.by;
- Mr. Aliaksandr Konyuk, General Prosecutor of Belarus, Email: info@prokuratura.gov.by;
- Mr. Oleg Slizhevsky, Minister of Justice of Belarus, Email: kanc@minjust.by;
- Mr. Leonid Anfimov, Chairman of the State Control Committee of Belarus, Email: kgk@mail.belpak.by;
- Mr. Ivan Kubrakov, minister of Internal Affairs of Belarus, Email: pismo_mvd@mia.by;
- Mr. Yury Ambrazevich, Permanent Mission of Belarus to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, Email: mission.belarus@ties.itu.int;
- H.E. Mr. Aliaksandr Mikhnevich, Embassy of Belarus in Brussels, Email: belgium@mfa.gov.by

Please also write to the diplomatic representations of Belarus in your respective countries.

Paris-Geneva, January 7, 2021

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to prevent or remedy situations of repression against

human rights defenders. FIDH and OMCT are both members of ProtectDefenders.eu, the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

? E-mail: Appeals@fidh-omct.org

? Tel FIDH +33 (0) 1 43 55 25 18

? Tel OMCT +41 (0) 22 809 49 39

[1] The representatives of the Main Department for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption claim that both searches and interrogation of Leanid Sudalenka were related to this criminal case. Mr. Nepomniashchyykh was arbitrarily detained on December 23, 2020, and is accused of "threatening government officials with violence". There are sufficient grounds to believe that the case against him was made up to punish the activist for his political and civic position.
