

Belarus

OPEN LETTER to Mrs. N. Pyatkevich, Deputy Head Secretary to the President of Belarus

Paris, 18 February 2009 - The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organisation Human Rights Center «Viasna» express their concerns with the use of force by the Belarus security forces against peaceful demonstrators on 14 and 16 February 2009, in Minsk, Belarus.

On 14 February 2009, a peaceful demonstration of the youth political movement “Young Front” took place in Minsk. According to information of Viasna, participants to this peaceful demonstration were subject to a violent attack from a special unit of the Ministry of the Interior. Dozens of peaceful demonstrators have been beaten up. The use of force from the forces of the Ministry of the Interior was a blatant violation of their right to freedom of peaceful assembly. This demonstration of force seemed to be a planned intimidation action organised by the Belarus authorities since on the eve of the assembly, search operations were conducted at the houses of “Young Front” activists.

The use of excessive force against peaceful young political activists comes in a context of harassment of activists from youth organisations in Belarus. On 27 January 2009, FIDH reported cases of recent drafting of political and civil organisations' activists into the army following the reversal of earlier decisions declaring them medically unfit for military service. FIDH expressed its belief that the drafts of Mr. **Franak Viachorka** (leader of the organisation « BPF Youth ») and Mr. **Ivan Shyla** (deputy head of the Solihorsk branch of the youth opposition movement « Young Front ») were directly linked to their militant activities.¹

On 28 January 2009, Mr. **Franak Viachorka** was arrested, beaten up, handcuffed and brought to the army Baranovichsky Brigade. Mr. **Ivan Shyla** was arrested at his home in Solihorsk and forcibly brought to the Minsk recruitment centre. He has now officially started his 1,5 year military service in Begomlem. On the same day, Mr. **Zmiter Fedaruk**, a fellow member of « Young Front » and full-time student at Bogoslovsky College, was arrested and drafted into a military unit in Zhodino.

On 16 February 2009, on October square in Minsk, policemen and special forces from the Ministry of the Interior (“OMON”) brutally dispersed a peaceful assembly marking the 16th of month. The 16th of the month is called “day of solidarity” in Belarus: on that day civil society activists traditionally hold a peaceful gathering dedicated to political prisoners and the disappeared persons. The assembly did not last for more than ten

¹ see Belarus: Very serious concern regarding the recent drafting of political and civil organisations' activists into the Belarus army at <http://www.fidh.org/spip.php?article6297>

minutes, when police and special forces started to brutally remove people from the square, pushing to the ground, beating them up with their fists and batons.

All those recent developments make FIDH and Viasna fear that the intentions for the democratisation and openness to international standards declared in the recent months by the Belarus authorities are indeed not put into practice.

FIDH draws the attention of the European Union High Representative for the CFSP, Mr. Javier Solana, due to hold talks with the Belarus authorities on 19 February, to these serious human rights issues. FIDH invites Mr. Solana to raise these serious issues, occurring in a context of increased EU efforts to support democratisation in Belarus, with the Belarus authorities.

FIDH calls the delegation from the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) who is visiting Minsk from 16 to 19 February 2009 to pay particular attention to this situation and put it on the agenda when sounding out the Belarus authorities on the prospects for developing a constructive dialogue with the Council of Europe and its Assembly in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

FIDH calls upon the Belarus authorities to:

- take measures to ensure that all forces of the Ministry of the Interior act in conformity with international standards which guarantee the right to freedom of peaceful assembly;
- ensure that all the initiators and perpetrators of the violence of 14 February 2009 are brought to justice;
- put an immediate end to all forms of harassment of activists from youth organisations;
- guarantee the right of peaceful assembly to all citizens of Belarus as guaranteed by the Belarus Constitution and international human rights instruments, in particular by Articles 19 and 21 of the ICCPR.

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