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Situation of political prisoners in Belarus worsening

- [english] - Eastern Europe & Central Asia - Belarus -

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Description :

Paris-Minsk, May 29, 2015. FIDH and its member organisation in Belarus, Human Rights Center "Viasna," are deeply concerned about the deteriorating detention conditions of political prisoners Yury Rubtsou, Makalai Statkevich, Mikalai Dziadok and Ihar Alynevich.

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Paris-Minsk, May 29, 2015. FIDH and its member organisation in Belarus, Human Rights Center "Viasna," are deeply concerned about the deteriorating detention conditions of political prisoners Yury Rubtsou, Makalai Statkevich, Mikalai Dziadok and Ihar Alynevich.

On 28 May, the District Court sentenced political prisoner **Yury Rubtsou** to two years in a penal colony on charges of evasion of punishment. Rubtsou was serving a 1.5 year sentence in an open correctional facility for allegedly insulting a judge. The open facility allowed him to leave to work a job assigned to him by the facility administration. He was accused of refusing employment by declining four job offers that Rubtsou found to be low paid. FIDH recalls that Rubtsou was initially brought to justice for wearing a T-Shirt reading *Lukashenka, go away*.

"Recent months have been marked by a continuous deterioration of the situation of political prisoners in Belarus. FIDH and "Viasna" denounce the growing pressure on political prisoners ahead of the Presidential elections scheduled for November 2015," declared Ales Bialiatski, "Viasna" Chairman and FIDH Vice-President.

In April 2015, charges of prison rule violation were brought against former presidential candidate **Mikalai Statkevich** who was subsequently condemned to transfer into a prison cell facility for the rest of his term. Convicted in 2011 on trumped-up charges of organising mass unrest on the day of presidential elections, Statkevich was serving a six-year term in a correctional colony. Since the beginning of his sentence, he was repeatedly subject to harassment, including transfer to an isolation cell, denial of meetings with relatives and food parcels. Stricter confinement conditions are used by the authorities to further exert pressure on the former presidential candidate, who was also forced to sign a petition for pardon multiple times.

Severe judicial harassment and pressure continues against the political prisoner **Mikalai Dziadok**. In February 2015, his sentence was extended for one year in addition to the 4.5 years he was sentenced to in 2011. His term was extended for alleged violation of prison rules under Article 411 of the Criminal Code. Before the prison term extension, Dziadok was charged with 16 violations, the main of which was "wearing a tracksuit instead of prison uniform" and "refusal to clean the cell." Each alleged violation was punished by placement in an isolation cell, denial of food parcels and meetings with relatives.

Transferred to a new detention facility on 12 May, Dziadok was placed in solitary confinement where the temperature was kept low, and which was especially cold at night. Subject to this alarming ill-treatment, Dziadok inflicted injuries upon himself in order to be transferred to a medical unit. According to information received, after first aid was administered to the prisoner, he was returned to the same confinement cell where he stayed until 26 May.

Little is known about another political prisoner, **Ihar Alynevich**. He has been denied meetings with relatives, who have not received information about him since the beginning of May 2015, when he spent ten days in solitary confinement. His relatives fear that he has been placed in solitary confinement again. Sentenced in 2011 to eight years in prison for "hooliganism" - charges he has always denied - he has been placed in solitary confinement at least six times since his transfer to the prison "Vitsba-3" in July 2014.

In the context of increasing signs of thaw between Minsk and the West, FIDH and Viasna alert the international community about the worsening detention conditions, the ongoing severe harassment and ill-treatment of political prisoners and urge the authorities of Belarus to immediately and unconditionally release them.