

Open Letter

Freedom for Ivan Mikhailau – Stop persecution of conscientious objectors in Belarus

Open Letter to the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko

by:

Libereco – Partnership for Human Rights (Bonn)

People in Need (Prague)

The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (Brussels)

Centre for Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Moscow)

Menschenrechte in Belarus e.V. (Berlin)

Östgruppen - the Swedish Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (Stockholm)

United Center of Initiatives for Belarus (Vilnius)

Janun e.V. Region Hannover (Hannover)

International Association Civic Belarus (Prague)

Bund für Soziale Verteidigung e.V. (Minden)

Europäischer Austausch (Berlin)

Gemeinschaft Schweizer Zivildienstleistender (Zurich)

Stockholm 27.01.2010 The prosecution of conscientious objectors in Belarus is increasing. On 29 January 2010 the 21-year-old Ivan Mikhailau is due to go on trial. He was charged of refusing compulsory military service and, therefore, arrested on 15 December 2009.

Ivan Mikhailau, a Messianic Jew, is unable to do military service because of his religious beliefs. He asked to be assigned to alternative civilian service, in line with Article 57 of Belarus' Constitution. The young man faces a fine or up to two years of imprisonment if found guilty.

Already in November 2009 Dzmitry Smyk, a Jehovah's Witness, was given a large fine after refusing compulsory military service for religious reasons and demanding his right of alternative civilian service. He is banned from leaving Belarus and restricted on his freedom of movement within the country. This became the first such case in nine years

According to Belarusian human rights organisations two more young men, Andrei Tsianiuta and Yauhen Yakavenka, are facing prosecution for refusing military service on grounds of conscience.

We recognize Ivan Mikhailau as a prisoner of conscience, arrested solely for his conscientious decision and we urge Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko to release him immediately and unconditionally.

We also call on President Lukashenko to revoke the fine against Dzmitry Smyk as well as his restrictions on freedom of movement.

Furthermore the charges against Ivan Mikhailau and Dzmitry Smyk have to be withdrawn.

Already in 2000 Belarus' Constitutional Court declared to urgently introduce alternative service.

We urge President Lukashenko to ensure the right on alternative civilian service to all men who are refusing compulsory military service for reasons of conscience, in line with Article 57 of Belarus' Constitution.

A law, which enables an alternative civilian service, has to be adopted in Belarus immediately. Until such a law is being introduced noone should be charged or sentenced because of refusing compulsory military service on conscientious reasons.

Yours sincerely

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