



IAPB STANDS IN SOLIDARITY WITH JAILED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FROM VIASNA

(3 March 2023) Today, the Leninsky District Court of Minsk handed down lengthy prison sentences against four human rights defenders from the IAPB's co-lead organisation, Viasna. Ales Bialiatski, its chairman and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and Valiantsin Stefanovich, its deputy, were sentenced to 10 and 9 years respectively. In the same case, Uladzimir Labkovich, coordinator of the campaign Human Rights Defenders for Free Election, as well as Dzmitry Salauyou, who was tried in absentia, also received prison sentences of 7 and 8 years, respectively.

Reacting to the verdict, Pavel Sapelko, representative and lawyer of Viasna, said:

"This is a serious wound for our organisation, and we are unable now to overturn the blatantly unjust verdict, an instrument of repression used by the Belarusian authorities. But we will not stop collecting evidence of the totalitarian regime's crimes, speaking the truth about the human rights situation in Belarus, and supporting the victims whose rights and freedoms have been violated. The disregard for the basic values of human rights cannot become the basis for the restoration of civil accord in our country."

As a co-lead organisation of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus since 2020, the Human Rights Centre Viasna has played a crucial role in documenting gross human rights violations allegedly committed by Belarusian authorities and others in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and its aftermath, with a view to support accountability efforts.

Since 2020, together with another IAPB co-lead, the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, Viasna has assisted the IAPB to collect information and evidence from over 2,200 Belarusian victims and other witnesses, allowing the IAPB to consolidate, preserve and analyse this information along with open-source intelligence. The IAPB has already shared some of this evidence with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' examination of the human rights situation in Belarus and prosecuting authorities in Europe.

In recognition of its contribution to the promotion of human rights in Belarus, Ales Bialiatski was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2022, and Viasna the Clooney Foundation for Justice Albie Award in the "Justice for Democracy Advocates" category in September 2022.

Kate Vigneswaran, Head of the IAPB, said:

"The IAPB is gravely concerned about the sentencing of prominent members of its partner organisation for carrying out legitimate human rights work, and calls on the Belarusian authorities to immediately annul the convictions of and release all persons currently in jail on

politically motivated charges. Viasna members should be allowed to do their important work without fear of retaliation.”

Hundreds of human rights defenders have been jailed following the violent crackdown on anti-government protests in 2020. Following the August 2020 presidential election in Belarus, Ales Bialiatski and Valiantsin Stefanovic were arrested on charged with tax evasion charges, which were replaced with charges relating to the smuggling of funds and financing group actions disrupting public order in September 2022, which attract an increased term of imprisonment. Three other members of Viasna remain in prison: Marfa Rabkova, coordinator of Viasna’s network of volunteers; Andrei Chapyuk, a volunteer, and Leanid Sudalenka, head of Viasna’s Homiel branch.

Media Contacts

- (English) **Kate Vigneswaran**, Head of the IAPB; kavi@dignity.dk
- (Belarusian/Russian) **Pavel Sapelko**, Representative and Lawyer, Human Rights Centre “Viasna” (IAPB co-lead): sapelko@gmail.com
- (Belarusian/Russian) **Victoria Federova**, Representative, International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus (IAPB co-lead) and Head, Legal Initiative: gomellawyer@gmail.com
- (Danish) **Jens Modvig**, Medical Director, Dignity (IAPB lead): JMO@dignity.dk

About the IAPB

The IAPB is a coalition of independent non-government organisations that have joined forces to collect, consolidate, verify, and preserve evidence of gross human rights violations constituting crimes under international law allegedly committed by Belarusian authorities and others in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and its aftermath. It builds on the ongoing efforts of Belarusian human rights organizations to collect information about human rights violations committed in Belarus. More information about the IAPB can be found on iapbelarus.org. The IAPB is led by DIGNITY (Danish Institute Against Torture), the Human Rights Centre “Viasna”, the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus and REDRESS.