



International Observation Mission  
of the Committee on International Control over  
the Situation with Human Rights in Belarus

Statement No.3  
“On the situation with human rights defenders  
and journalists in the Republic of Belarus  
as of January 13th, 2011”

*Acting on behalf of the Committee on International Control over the Situation with Human Rights in Belarus, which unites representatives of human rights organizations from the OSCE countries together with international civil society organizations, monitoring the overall situation with the observance of fundamental human rights in the Republic of Belarus, as well as the issues of defending human rights defenders and ensuring their professional activities, emphasizing that human rights are the subject of direct and legitimate concern of international civil society, urging the government of Belarus to follow the undertaken international obligations in the sphere of human rights, and urging the OSCE member states to control the fulfillment of these obligations according to the OSCE principles;*

**the International Observation Mission,**

noting that the human rights situation in Belarus has become subject to assessment by various international organizations and institutions: the European Parliament, the three Special Rapporteurs of the UN (on the situation of human rights defenders, on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, on the independence of judges and lawyers), the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE, as well as the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who have expressed concern over the continued detention of journalists, presidential candidates and their agents and called for their immediate release and full respect for their human rights;

welcoming the fact that more than 100 NGOs from 20 countries of the OSCE called on the OSCE participating States to take action against the human rights situation in Belarus, including through the mechanisms of the human dimension;

**expresses its concerns on the following:**

– the Mission continues to receive information about searches of homes and offices of independent journalists and human rights defenders in various cities of Belarus, in particular, in Minsk, Grodno and Gomel;

– the evidence of pressure on the families of imprisoned political opponents of the government, in particular the family of presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov and journalist Irina Khalip<sup>1</sup> of Novaya Gazeta, as well as the family of the presidential candidate Ales Mihalevich<sup>2</sup> periodically appears in the media ;

<sup>1</sup> <http://euroradio.by/by/1457/news/59781>

<sup>2</sup> <http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=48892>

- there has not been an official denial of the information, prevalent in the media, that the admission of lawyers and families of the accused in a criminal case on the riots 19 December 2010, was not secured; in particular the former presidential candidates Andrei Sannikov, Vladimir Neklyayev and Nicholas Statkevich and journalists Alexander Atroushchankau, Irina Khalip and Natalia Radina were not attended by lawyers since late December last year.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the official website of the Ministry of Justice has reported that, in their view, some media publications that appear, distort information about the access to legal assistance to those under investigation in connection to the events of December 19, 2010. Ministry of Justice has thus issued a warning for violation by certain media outlets of the Law of Belarus "On Mass Media". Specific examples of information and the grounds for such warning were not specified.

Ministry of Justice also reports that it has issued a written warning to the Belarusian Helsinki Committee for violation of legislation on public associations, mass media and their own Charter, for spreading false information, defaming law enforcement and judicial authorities of the Republic - after the human rights organization has sent an appeal to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

On television, an informational campaign was launched that seeks to convince the public of the guilt of the accused, while conclusions about a person's guilt before the end of investigation violate the principle of presumption of innocence. An example of such campaign is the demonstration of the documentary "Iron on the glass".

**In connection with the above, based on the mandate of the International Observation Mission of the Committee on International Control over the Situation with Human Rights in Belarus, insists that the authorities of the Republic of Belarus:**

- cease to use criminal prosecution and investigations to obstruct the work of human rights defenders, as well as a pretext to put pressure on political opponents and members of their families;
- scrupulously ensure observance of the guarantees for human dignity for all suspects and accused, as well as their access to qualified legal assistance;
- respond to reports in the media and to official appeals about human rights violations addressed to government agencies and intergovernmental structures by investigating the actions of state bodies and officials, rather than by sanctions against the authors of the appeals.

*January 14th, 2011,  
Minsk*

**Mission Representative in the Republic of Belarus  
Alexandra Delemenchuk,**

**Head of the Mission  
Andrey Yurov**

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.imperiya.by/news.html?id=58778>