

December 2, 2020

Mr. Aliaksandr Lukashenka

End persecution of peaceful protesters and human rights activists in Belarus

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned Right Livelihood Laureates, write you to express our deep concern at the current government crackdown on peaceful protests following the 2020 Presidential Elections, and particularly, at the latest acts of retaliation against Human Rights Center “Viasna,” a 2020 Right Livelihood Laureate and leading non-governmental organisation contributing to the development of civil society in Belarus.

Courage is at the core of the Right Livelihood Award, a trait that has characterised Viasna and its members since its inception. As an organisation defending democracy and human rights in what is commonly known as the “last dictatorship in Europe,” Viasna and its members have been relentlessly persecuted by Belarusian authorities. Most recently, they suffered reprisals in the run-up to and aftermath of the 2020 fraudulent elections, in which occasion Viasna played a leading role in advocating for democracy and freedom of assembly, defending the rights of people arrested for protesting and thoroughly documenting human rights abuses.

We have followed with great concern the latest developments in the country including blatant violations of fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of opinion and expression, association and peaceful assembly, as well as the authorities’ determination to violently suppress all forms of dissent. These abuses continue to take place and remain unpunished. We applaud the determination of the Belarusian population and civil society in their fight for democracy and condemn in the strongest terms the brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters, including members and volunteers of Viasna. During the months preceding Election Day, seven members of Viasna’s regional offices were arbitrarily detained, together with numerous activists, some of whom remain behind bars on politically motivated charges. Defending democracy and human rights should never be a crime. Civil society should instead be an ally that is included in the solution to the current crisis.

We are particularly troubled by the recent arrest of Marfa Rabkova, coordinator of Viasna’s volunteer service, who was arrested on September 17, on charges of “training or other preparation of persons for the participation in mass riots, or financing of such activities.” Her role consisted of observing peaceful assemblies and documenting evidence of



torture of detained protesters. Her work has been fundamental to providing a better understanding of what is happening in the country and should never be considered a crime. On October 2, Andrei Chapiuk, a volunteer for the organisation, faced the same ordeal and was arrested for “participating in riots.” His “crime” is to have assisted political prisoners with the aim of protecting their rights. Both Rabkova and Chapiuk are currently held in pre-trial detention centre No.1 in Minsk.

Today, we, as Right Livelihood Laureates and individuals bound by the principles of humanity and solidarity, demand that you:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Viasna’s human rights activists Marfa Rabkova and Andrei Chapiuk and drop all charges against them; release all protesters, journalists, human rights defenders, civil society activists and opposition members who have been detained solely for peacefully exercising their fundamental freedoms in the aftermath of the 2020 Presidential Elections;
- Stop the persecution, harassment and intimidation of those who exercise their fundamental freedoms to assembly, expression and association, and ensure that all those rights be respected and protected across the Belarusian society;
- Act in line with the Belarusian Constitution and international human rights obligations by allowing civil society and human rights defenders to carry out their peaceful human rights activities, free of any form of intimidation and reprisals;
- End impunity, bring to justice the perpetrators of human rights abuses and ensure that they are investigated and prosecuted for the crimes they have committed.

We will continue to stand by Viasna in its endeavour to ensure democracy and by the courageous Belarusian people taking to the streets to demand respect for democracy, rule of law and human rights principles.

Most respectfully,

The Undersigned Right Livelihood Laureates:

Angie Zelter for **Trident Ploughshares**, United Kingdom, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2001*

Hunter Lovins, United States of America, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1983*

Paul Walker, United States of America, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2013*

Martin von Hildebrand for **Consolidation of the Amazon Region**, Colombia *Right Livelihood Laureate 1999*

Theo van Boven, the Netherlands, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1985*

András Bíró, Hungary, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1995*

Wes Jackson, president emeritus of the **Land Institute**, United States of America, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2000*



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Frances Moore Lappé, United States of America, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1987*

Tony Rinaudo, Australia, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2018*

Sima Samar, Afghanistan, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2012*

John F. Charlewood Turner, United Kingdom, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1988*

Anwar Fazal, Malaysia, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1982*

Colin Gonsalves, India, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2017*

Kvinna till Kvinna, Sweden, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2002*

Yetnebersh Nigussie, Ethiopia, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2017*

Maude Barlow, Canada, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2005*

Dipal Barua, former managing director of **Grameen Shakti**, Bangladesh, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2007*

P K Ravindran for **KSSP India**, India, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1996*

Annelies Allain for **International Baby Food Action Network**, International, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1998*

Helen Mack, Guatemala, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1992*

Alyn Ware, New Zealand, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2009*

Aminatou Haidar, Western Sahara, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2019*

Ruchama Marton for **Physicians for Human Rights**, Israel, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2010*

Walden Bello, Philippines, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2003*

Juan Pablo Orrego S., Chile, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1998*

Raúl Montenegro, Argentina, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2004*

Sulak Sivaraksa, Thailand, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1995*

Gino Strada, Italy, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2015*

Bianca Jagger, Nicaragua, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2004*

Ida Kuklina, Russia, *Right Livelihood Laureate 1996*

Khadija Ismayilova, Azerbaijan, *Right Livelihood Laureate 2017*