



## **Statement of the Belarusian National Youth Council "RADA" in relation to the detention of youth activists in Belarus**

We, the union of twenty seven democratic youth organizations of Belarus, being created with the purpose of consolidating of youth organizations and initiatives of Belarus for representation, promotion and defending common interests, exercising right to freedoms of association and other constitutional rights, represented by the Governing Body – the Board of “RADA”, make the following statement:

"RADA" is very concerned about the wave of pressure on public activists in Belarus and violations of freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, which occurred in early of May 2020. We pay special attention to cases of overreaction to the actions of young people by police and courts.

During May 8 and 9, five youth activists in Minsk, who participated in the action Coffin Dance Minsk, were arrested. Elizaveta Prokopchyk and Danila Lavretski were charged with violation of article 23.34 of the Code of Administrative Violations on the 'Order of organizing and holding mass events'. On May 11 they were sentenced to 5 and 13 days of arrest respectively. Mikhas Vorontsou, Veronika Yanovych and Uladzimir Klauchyn spent up to 12 hours in the police department as witnesses, after which they were released. During this time they were not allowed to inform their families about their current location.

On Monday, May 11, Peter Markelov was detained when he was in court with a group of people who came to support Elizabeth and Danila. On May 13 he was sentenced to 10 days of arrest for the fact that he was "lying on a bench out of hooliganism".

The action Coffin Dance Minsk, which was recognized by the court as a mass event, was peaceful in our opinion, and its participants sought to express their opinion about the holding of mass events during the pandemic coronavirus in a country. We believe that the detention and persecution of the participants of the action violates the Article 35 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We remind that the Republic of Belarus recognizes the primacy of generally recognized principles of international law and ensures that legislation is consistent with them. Therefore, police actions against young activists also violate international law!



The circumstances under which Peter Markelov was detained are even more outrageous. We see this situation as an attempt to intimidate and suspend solidarity and support among young people.

In the cases described above, we see efforts of the Belarusian authorities to limit the opportunities for peaceful citizens' meetings. In our point of view, the coincidence of the beginning of a wave of pressure and the announcement of the beginning of the campaign for the presidential election is not accidental. It is important to mention that from beginning of May there were more than 100 participants of peaceful assemblies detained all over the country, including journalists and human rights defenders.

Such actions create an atmosphere of oppression and fear in society, which is multiplied by the uncertainty and prolongation of the coronavirus pandemic. This state of affairs has a very negative impact on social and political processes and can lead to aggravation of social problems and increase of aggression in society.

On that basis, we call on the Belarusian authorities to stop immediately the persecution of participants in peaceful assemblies and to release detainees.

We express our solidarity with all detainees, as well as our sincere gratitude to all Belarusian citizens, activists, representatives of the international community and international institutions for their support and solidarity with detainees.

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