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Iceland to the OSCE



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### **Statement by the Permanent Representative of Iceland on Human Rights Violations in Belarus**

Under item 2 Review of Current Issues of the 698th Meeting of the Permanent Council of January 31st 2008

Mr. Chairman

The fundamental values upon which the OSCE rests and which all states here subscribe to, include freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly. No one should be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention or to cruel or inhuman treatment. Everyone has the right to a fair and public trial.

Participation by young people in the democratic process and their right to freedom of expression is something to be particularly welcomed and encouraged.

It is with this in mind that the Delegation of Iceland would like to raise the following concerns in relation to recent events in Belarus.

On January 9-13, 2008 a delegation from the Democrat Youth Community of Europe, DEMYC, visited Belarus. The delegation consisted of 10 young politicians from Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Iceland and the Netherlands. Their aim was to get a better understanding of how the operation of democracy in the country and of possible impediments on democracy. DEMYC was hosted in Minsk by the youth movement of the Belarus Popular Front (BPF Youth).

While the members of DEMYC were in Minsk, a demonstration was held on January 10th at the Independence Square against a presidential decree, which prohibits small entrepreneurs and vendors from hiring staff other than their family members. The DEMYC delegation, accompanied by Franak Viachorka, Anton Kalinovski and Yury Stankievic from BPF Youth, observed the demonstration but did not take part in it.

On January 11th a press conference of independent media was organized at the BPF headquarters. This conference had to be held in secret. The same day the delegation also had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Aleksander Milinkevich, the former presidential candidate of the opposition.

Among the people the DEMYC team met were Lavron Barsceuski, chairman of BPF, Vincuk Viachorka, first vice-chairman of BPF, Zianon Pazniak, chairman of Conservative Christian Party - Belarus Popular Front and his deputy Yuri Belenki.

One day after the study visit on January 14th the DEMYC learned that the security services (KGB) had called two of the DEMYC hosts for questioning. On January 15th BPF Youth members Franak Viachorka, Anton Kalinovski and Yury Stankievic were arrested by the militia in front of the court building of Minsk's Central Court, while waiting for the verdict of a trial of another activist.

Franak Viachorka and Anton Kalinovski were charged with "using obscene language during the arrest" and were sentenced to 15 days of imprisonment.

Yury Stankievic was beaten by the militia to extract a confession to having participated in the demonstration on 10th of January. According to the DEMYC delegation, Mr. Stankievic observed the demonstration with the delegation from a distance and was not involved himself.

Young Front members Uladzimier Siarhiejeu, Kacia Krasnova, Ludmila Atakulava, Kacia Halickaja, Maksim Viniarski, Pavel Kurjanovic, Olga Kulakievic were arrested in Kastrycnickaja square in Minsk, while they were skating. They were accused of "using obscene language and taking part in the demonstration on January 10th". These young people were kept overnight in prison, where they had neither access to warm clothes nor food and were not allowed to contact their families.

Each arrestee was brought in front of a court with two militia as eye-witnesses. The trials never took longer time than one hour. The defense attorney was only allowed to talk to his clients during the trials and those injured by the militia did not have access to any medical care.

The arrestees were sentenced up to 15 days in prison in the Administrative Prison at Akrescina Street in Minsk. Their families have neither received any information about their whereabouts nor their condition and are not allowed to have any contact with the prisoners.

We are informed that most of these young people are students and will face expulsion from University on top of their imprisonment. We sincerely hope that this will not be the case.

Mr. Chairman,

It is difficult to see how these young people merited imprisonment or the other treatment meted out. On behalf of the Government of Iceland and of the young Icelandic democrats who visited Belarus, I would like to express serious concern for the wellbeing of the individuals imprisoned, and at the frequent reports of harassment by the authorities in Belarus of people exercising their democratic and human rights.