

## **BELARUS: AUTHORITIES SHOULD IMMEDIATELY RELEASE DETAINED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER LEANID SUDALENKA**

*Statement by members of the Civic Solidarity Platform*

22 January 2021

We, the undersigned organisations, members of the Civic Solidarity Platform, express our indignation about the [detention of Belarusian human rights defender](#) Leanid Sudalenka, head of the Human Rights Center Viasna branch in Homiel, and demand his immediate release and dropping of all charges against him.

Leanid Sudalenka is a prominent human rights defender, who primarily works on documenting human rights violations and has helped Belarusian citizens to prepare over 80 individual complaints to the UN Human Rights Committee. Leanid Sudalenka is a recipient of the 2018 “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” Human Rights Prize of the French Republic. In 2019, he received the National Human Rights Award for achievements in the area of human rights work.

On 18 January, Leanid Sudalenka was detained and taken to the Investigative Committee’s city office for questioning. He is detained as part of a criminal case under Art. 342 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (“Organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order, or active participation in them”). Sudalenka’s status in the case, however, remains unknown.

This detention was preceded by [persistent harassment](#) of Mr. Sudalenka by Belarusian authorities. On 5 January 2021, his office was searched by the officers of the Main Department for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The search lasted for about 10 hours, and the officials confiscated 304 items, including Leanid Sudalenka’s laptop and bank cards. The officers also seized documents related to administrative cases and complaints of protesters as well as white-red-white flags of independent Belarus which are used as symbols of protests. The same evening, another search was conducted in his apartment.

After the search in the office, Leanid Sudalenka was taken to the Office for Combating Organized Crime for an interrogation as a witness in the criminal case. However, Sudalenka noted that during the interrogation he was asked about his legal and other assistance to people who had been detained, fined and arrested during the post-electoral protests in Homiel. In addition, during the search, the officials predominantly inquired about information about his work, his data carriers and bank cards.

We express our strongest concern over the harassment and detention of Leanid Sudalenka which we perceive as retaliation for his peaceful and legitimate human rights work. Leanid Sudalenka has committed no crime and there are no grounds for his prosecution. The actions of Belarusian authorities constitute a major breach of Belarus’ obligations under international human rights law and OSCE commitments.

We demand that Belarusian authorities immediately and unconditionally release Leanid Sudalenka, drop all charges and stop the persecution against him. The authorities should also stop the persecution of other members of Human Rights Center Viasna, including [Marfa Rabkova](#), [Andrei Chapiuk](#), who are currently in detention centers, and all Belarusian human rights activists. The authorities should also guarantee that all human rights defenders in Belarus are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions in all circumstances.

We urge OSCE executive and political bodies, institutions and participating States to take active public, diplomatic and other steps to ensure that Belarusian human rights defenders are immediately released and persecution against them is stopped. Continued large scale repression by the authorities of Belarus against human rights defenders, journalists, political opposition members, and participants of peaceful protests, as well as the ongoing torture and ill-treatment of detainees and suppression of all fundamental freedoms is intolerable. Stopping them and ending impunity for massive human rights abuse should be a primary subject of international action aimed at resolving the worst human rights crisis in Europe in the last two decades.

**List of organizations supporting the statement:**

1. Libereco Partnership for Human Rights, Germany
2. KRF Public Alternative, Ukraine
3. Center for Civil Liberties, Ukraine
4. DRA Berlin, Germany
5. Human Rights Monitoring Institute, Lithuania
6. International Partnership for Human Rights, Belgium
7. Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Russia
8. Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan
9. Public Association "Dignity", Kazakhstan
10. Public Verdict Foundation, Russia
11. The Barys Zvoskau Belarusian Human Rights House, Belarus/Lithuania
12. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland
13. Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Belarus
14. Legal Policy Research Center, Kazakhstan
15. Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Norway
16. [humanrights.ch](http://humanrights.ch), Switzerland
17. Association UMDPL, Ukraine
18. World Organization against Torture, Belgium
19. Netherlands Helsinki Committee, Netherlands
20. Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyzstan
21. Human Rights Group "Citizen.Army.Law", Russia
22. Human Rights Center "Memorial", Russia
23. Legal Transformation Center, Belarus
24. IDP Women Association "Consent", Georgia

25. Human Rights Center ZMINA, Ukraine
26. Helsinki Committee of Armenia
27. Women of the Don, Russia
28. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Vanadzor, Armenia
29. The Swedish OSCE-network, Sweden