

27 March 2017

### **Belarus: Human rights defender Pavel Levinov detained and in critical health condition**

On 26 March 2017, human rights defender Pavel Levinov was arrested by police from the Oktyabrsky District in Vitebsk city on the charge of participating in an unauthorised peaceful assembly. He was initially kept in a temporary detention centre. Later that day, he was hospitalised after suffering a hypertensive crisis.

Pavel Levinov is a board member of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, one of the oldest human rights organizations in Belarus, which was created to promote human rights as an essential part of the political and economic development of Belarus. Pavel Levinov provides free legal assistance to citizens in the Vitebsk region. He also specialises in drafting and submitting complaints to the UN Human Rights Committee on behalf of Belarusian citizens faced with violations of their civil, political, social, and cultural rights.

On 26 March 2017, Pavel Levinov was detained by police from the Oktyabrsky District in Vitebsk city while monitoring a peaceful assembly held against Presidential Decree No.3, "On prevention of social dependency." During the protest on 25 and 26 March in Vitebsk, Pavel Levinov was an official observer on behalf of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. He was accused of an alleged violation of Article 23.34 Part 1 of the Code of Administrative Offences (participating in unauthorized peaceful assembly) and placed in a temporary detention centre. While in detention, his blood pressure increased and he suffered a hypertensive crisis. He was taken to hospital in an ambulance later that day. He is currently being treated in hospital, with constant security supervision.

On 27 March 2017, Pavel Levinov was scheduled to appear before a judge, but the hearing was postponed until his release from hospital due to his critical condition. If found guilty as charged, he could face an administrative fine or administrative detention. In the case of aggregated sentences, he can be detained for up to 25 days.

On [21 March 2017](#), human rights defender [Oleg Volchek](#) was found guilty of participating in an unauthorised peaceful assembly by the Frunzensky District Court of Minsk city and sentenced to thirteen days imprisonment. On [17 March 2017](#), human rights lawyers [Leonid Sudalenko](#) and [Anatoly Poplavnyi](#) were found guilty of non-compliance with the legal requirements for organising and conducting mass events, also in relation to a peaceful demonstration against Decree No.3. Leonid Sudalenko was given a warning and Anatoly Poplavnyi was sentenced to ten days of administrative detention. On [25 March 2017](#) at least 58 human rights observers were detained at the offices of the human rights centre [Viasna](#) ahead of a planned peaceful demonstration.

Since the beginning of February 2017, thousands of people have protested peacefully in many cities of Belarus against the decree, which is in violation of the Constitution and International Human Rights Law, as it sanctions people who have worked less than 183 days per year by imposing a penalty in the form of a fee and/or administrative arrest. The demonstrations were not authorised by the Belarusian authorities, who use various pretexts to restrict the right of peaceful assembly. More than 700 people were detained by the police following these peaceful demonstrations. Those detained include human rights defenders, journalists, and civil and political activists throughout the country.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern at the continued detention of human rights defenders Pavel Levinov, Oleg Volchek and Anatoly Poplavnyi. Front Line Defenders is particularly concerned at the critical state of Pavel Levinov's health. It believes the detention of the three human rights defenders is linked to their legitimate and peaceful human rights work in Belarus.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Belarus to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally drop all charges against Pavel Levinov, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Take all necessary measures to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Pavel Levinov and to guarantee his physical and psychological security;
3. Immediately drop all charges against Oleg Volchek, Leonid Sudalenko, Anatoly Poplavnyi and all other human rights defenders who have been detained for exercising their freedom of assembly as it is believed that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances 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.