

22 March 2017

Belarus: Human rights lawyers Leonid Sudalenko and Anatoly Poplavnyi administratively charged

On 17 March 2017, the Centralny District Court of Gomel city found human rights lawyers **Leonid Sudalenko** and **Anatoly Poplavnyi** guilty of non-compliance with the legal requirements on the organisation and conducting of mass events. Leonid Sudalenko was given a warning and Anatoly Poplavnyi was sentenced to ten days of administrative detention.

[Leonid Sudalenko](#) and [Anatoly Poplavnyi](#) are Gomel-based human rights lawyers. Leonid Sudalenko is the head of the Gomel city branch of the civil society association **Justice Initiative**, which provides victims of human rights violations with legal support. Leonid Sudalenko monitors and documents human rights violations in the Gomel region, campaigns for the abolition of the death penalty in Belarus, and specialises in preparing individual complaints to the United Nations Human Rights Committee. Anatoly Poplavnyi is a member of the Gomel branch of **The Human Rights Centre 'Viasna'**, which works to promote human rights and provides practical assistance to civic initiatives for the legal defense of citizens. It also conducts research into the state of civil society and legal defense in Belarus.

On 17 March 2017, the Centralny District Court of Gomel city held a hearing on the administrative case brought against Leonid Sudalenko and Anatoly Poplavnyi by the police department of the Centralny district of Gomel. The human rights lawyers were accused of violating Article 23.34 Part 1 of the Code of Administrative Offences (non-compliance with the legal requirements on the organisation and conducting of mass events) and were found guilty. Leonid Sudalenko was given a warning and Anatoly Poplavnyi was sentenced to ten days of administrative detention. Prior to the court's judgement, Leonid Sudalenko was summoned to the police department of the Centralny district of Gomel for interrogation.

On 19 February 2017, Leonid Sudalenko and Anatoly Poplavnyi participated in a peaceful protest against the Presidential Decree №3 "On prevention of social dependency". This Decree 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 protest was attended by around two thousand people. Although Leonid Sudalenko, Anatoly Poplavnyi, and other organisers of the protests applied for permission to hold the peaceful demonstration 15 days prior, which is required by law, the Gomel City Executive Committee refused the permission. As a result, the organisers called on Gomel residents to take part in an unsanctioned peaceful assembly.

Leonid Sudalenko submitted more than 200 complaints to the courts against the provisions of Decree № 3 on behalf of Gomel citizens. Those who made a complaint were recognised as "social parasites" as a result, and ordered to pay the fee. Since the beginning of February 2017 thousands of people have protested peacefully in many cities of Belarus against this restrictive legislation. The demonstrations were not authorised by the Belarusian authorities who use different pretexts to restrict the right of peaceful assemblies. More than 250 people were detained by the police following these peaceful demonstrations. Those detained include human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society activists.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern at the charges against human rights lawyers Leonid Sudalenko and Anatoly Poplavnyi, as it believes they are linked to their legitimate and peaceful human rights work in Belarus.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Belarus to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Leonid Sudalenko and Anatoly Poplavnyi as it is believed that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Take all necessary measures to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of human rights lawyer Anatoly Poplavnyi and guarantee his physical and psychological security;
3. 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.