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Belarus: Irina Sukhiy arrested and sentenced to administrative detention

On 8 September 2020, woman human rights defender **Irina Sukhiy** was sentenced to five days of administrative detention, for allegedly violating the procedure for holding a protest.

Irina Sukhiy is a prominent Belarusian environmental human rights defender. She is head of the board of the NGO Ecohome, chairperson of the Green Network Council and leader of the campaign opposing the construction of the Ostrovets nuclear power plant. Established in 1996, Ecohome is one of the longest-running non-profit organisations in Belarus. It raises awareness on sustainable development and provides education on renewable sources of energy, advocating for increased public participation in environmental decision-making processes.

On 8 September 2020, the Sovetsky Court of Minsk sentenced Irina Sukhiy to five days of administrative detention for violating the procedure for holding a protest (article 23.34(1) of the Code of Administrative Offences). The charges relate to her participation in the Women's March, which took place on 29 August 2020, calling for the resignation of the President of Belarus. The judge did not take the welfare of Irina Sukhiy's 93 year-old mother into consideration, for whom Sukhiy is the primary carer.

Also on 8 September 2020, attempts were made to break into the apartment of the director of Ecohome, Marina Dubina and police carried out an inspection at the home of Irina Sukhiy's daughter, Sofiya Sadovskaya.

Previously, on 6 December 2020, a group of unidentified men in plain-clothes broke into Irina Sukhiy's apartment. They did not state the reason for their inspection nor did they identify themselves before entry. They arrested the woman human rights defender and brought her to the Sovetsky District Police Department in Minsk. After taking her to the police station, the men inspected the apartment and confiscated a number of laptops. Only her mother witnessed the inspection; Sukhiy's daughters were denied access to the apartment.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the arrest and detention of Irina Sukhiya, without a warrant, as well as the subsequent harassment of her family and colleagues. Her arrest follows a number of acts of intimidation and criminalisation of human rights defenders in Belarus since the results of the 2020 Presidential elections were announced on 9 August. Front Line Defenders expresses concern that these actions may have a chilling effect on the promotion and protection of human rights in the Belarus, and may be uncondusive towards the creation of a safe and enabling environment in which defenders can carry out their work.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Belarus to:

1. Take all necessary measures to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Irina Sukhiy and guarantee her physical and psychological security and integrity, as well as that of her family;
2. Immediately drop all charges against Irina Sukhiy as it is believed that they are solely motivated by her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;

3. Return the items confiscated during the police inspection, as they are manifestly not linked to any criminal activity;

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.