

8 October 2020

## Belarus: Woman human rights defender Marina Dubina administratively arrested

On 8 October 2020, woman human rights defender **Marina Dubina** was sentenced to 13 days in detention in a trial marked by irregularities. She had been violently arrested two days earlier on suspicion of “violating the procedure for holding a protest”.

Marina Dubina is a Belarusian environmental human rights defender, lawyer and executive director of the NGO Ecohome. 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. Marina Dubina advocates for the protection of citizens’ rights to a favourable environment. She leads seminars and training sessions on public participation in environmentally significant decision-making, she carries out public environmental impact assessment surveys on industrial facilities and engages in nature conservation.

On 8 October 2020, the Central District Court of Minsk sentenced Marina Dubina to 13 days in administrative detention in relation to her participation in a peaceful protest on 23 August 2020. It follows a court hearing on 7 October 2020, when she was falsely charged with participating in a different demonstration, which took place on 23 September 2020.

On 6 October 2020, at around 3pm, Marina Dubina was detained while leaving the building of the “Korpus” cultural centre in Minsk. According to witnesses, unidentified persons in police uniform without identification badges, shot tear gas in the direction of the woman human rights defender, pulled her into a nearby vehicle and drove away. Colleagues and relatives of Marina Dubina could not get information on her whereabouts until close to midnight that evening.

On 7 October 2020, a court hearing took place where Dubina was accused of “violating the procedure for holding a protest” in relation with a demonstration that took place in Minsk on 23 September 2020. The woman human rights defender told the court that she was in the Belarusian city of Brest at the time, having arrived there on 22 September.

The judge planned to call in a classified witness from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, whose identity would not be revealed. Dubina’s lawyer opposed the action on the basis that the Administrative Code does not allow for classified witnesses. According to local human rights defenders, since the beginning of mass protests in Belarus contesting the 2020 Presidential election results, Courts have increasingly attempted to call in classified witnesses from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to testify against Government critics. Dubina’s lawyer requested to recuse the judge, which was refused. The case was eventually returned to the District Office of the Internal Affairs for “remedial action”. On 8 October, the Court convicted Dubina for her participation in a different protest, which took place a month earlier on 23 August 2020.

Previously, on 8 September 2020, there were attempts to break into Marina Dubina’s apartment. The same day Dubina’s colleague and head of the board of the NGO Ecohome, **Irina Sukhiy** was [sentenced to five days of administrative detention](#) for violating the procedure for holding a protest. Initially, Irina Sukhiy was also accused of participation in a protest on a day when she was outside of Minsk. Similarly, when the case was sent for remedial action the date was changed, and the human rights defender was sentenced to five days’ administrative detention.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the administrative arrest of Marina Dubina and ongoing harassment of Ecohome members. 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 Marina Dubina and guarantee her physical and psychological security and integrity;
2. Immediately overturn Marina Dubina's sentence as Front Line Defenders believes that it is solely motivated by her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
3. Immediately cease the harassment and prosecution of all members of Ecohome and guarantee that their right to freedom of association and assembly is respected.
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.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 5: *"For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully" and (b) To form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups.*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

*Executive Director*