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Mr. António Guterres
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Sharan Burrow

General Secretary
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25 April 2022

Arrests in Belarus

Dear Secretary-General,

We would really appreciate your intervention regarding this human rights travesty.

The situation for independent trade unions in Belarus has seriously deteriorated. On 19 April 2022, the leadership of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP) - the President of BKDP Aliaksandr Yarashuk, BKDP Vice-President Siarhei Antusevich, President of Free Trade Union of Metal Workers (SPM) Aliaksandr Bukhvostau, President of Free Trade Union of Belarus (SPB) Mikalaj Sharakh - were arrested by the State Security Committee (KGB).

We were also informed that several other colleagues were also arrested, with total of at least 18 people. While some of them were released last Friday (though prohibited to communicate), we are extremely worried about the leaders who are still in custody. They are under serious psychological pressure by KGB investigators. Aliaksandr Bukhvostau was taken to hospital with heart issues after many hours 'interrogations.

Even worse, it is appalling that there is no direct contact with some of detained, no access to them by advocates. Until today no one has even seen or spoken with BKDP President Aliaksandr Yarashuk and the only confirmation about his whereabouts was by the KGB officers themselves. We are extremely worried about his safety and health.

These developments are deeply concerning. The unions of the BKDP have been to the forefront in the fight for democracy in Belarus for more than twenty years. Many of our trade union colleagues have been repressed during this time, in particular after the fraudulent elections in August 2020, because of their principle stand for fundamental freedoms and rights that the Lukashenko regime has been suppressing. The BKDP leaders have been also vocal against the war that Russia is waging against Ukraine and the role of Belarus in it.

It is a clear signal that the regime no longer has any tolerance towards any democratic and free movement in the country, which the BKDP is the largest and probably the last part of. Nor does the regime appear to feel bound by any international conventions, including, those from the International Labour Organisation.

The ILO Director General Guy Ryder addressed the situation in an urgent communique https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_842821/lang--en/index.htm of 21 April 2022.

We value any influence you can bring to our demands for immediate access to and information about detained leaders along with full respect of their human rights, including for fair trial and human treatment, to call for release of all arrested trade unionists. Any support from your office for these democratic trade union leaders of Belarus is deeply appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. B.', with a stylized, cursive flourish extending to the right.

General Secretary