

Andrey Shved

Prosecutor General of the Republic of Belarus

Vul. Internatsionalnaya, 22 220030 Minsk, Belarus

Email: info@prokuratura.gov.by

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/prokuraturaby>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/prokuraturaby>

Dear Prosecutor General,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the arrest on 14 July and subsequent transfer to pretrial detention on 17 July of the chair of the Human Rights Centre Viasna, **Ales Bialiatski**, the vice chair of Viasna **Valyantsin Stefanovich**, and Viasna's lawyer **Uladzimir Labkovich**. They are human rights defenders who have committed no crime and are being targeted in retaliation for their human rights work.

Ales Bialiatski, Valyantsin Stefanovich and Uladzimir Labkovich were arrested on 14 July alongside others during the most recent instance of mass raids by law enforcement targeting civil society, opposition groups and human rights organizations. In March, the Belarusian Investigative Committee had opened a criminal case into the activities of Viasna under Article 342 of the Criminal Code ("organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order"), which is believed to be the reason for the pretrial detention of Valyantsin Stefanovich, Uladzimir Labkovich and Ales Bialiatski. Article 342 has been consistently misused to launch unfounded cases targeting civil society activists, independent media and human rights defenders as part of the ongoing crackdown that has been going on since the widely disputed presidential election in August 2020, when thousands of Belarusians took to the streets in mostly peaceful protests.

In the light of the above,

I urge you to do everything in your power to ensure the immediate release of Valyantsin Stefanovich, Uladzimir Labkovich, and Ales Bialiatski as they have committed no recognizable criminal offence and are being prosecuted in retaliation for their human rights work.

Yours sincerely,