

Statement from the BASTUN network on the arrest and detention on Belarus Trade Union Leaders

The BASTUN – Baltic Sea Trade Union Network - condemns the arrest and detention Tuesday 19 April in Belarus of several leaders and representatives of the country’s independent trade union movement.

The leadership of the Belarusian Congress of Trade Unions (BKDP) including 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. Other colleagues arrested include Yana Malash, Vitali Chychmarou, Hanna Dus, Vadzim Payvin, Mikhail Hromau, Ihar Komlik (released today), Yury Beliakou, Vasil Berasneu, Hennadz Fiadynich, Dzmitry Barodka, Miraslau Sabchuk and Iryna Bud-Husaim. Several other trade union officials are still not reachable, and their location is not known.

The Belarussian security force KGB have searched several trade union premises, such as those of BKDP, SPB, SPM and REP as well as the homes of trade union leaders and employees. The searches covered personal computers, personal documents, passports, bank cards including those of family members, SIM cards of foreign mobile operators and trade union paraphernalia.

The trade union colleagues in Belarus have for many years shown great courage and fought for fundamental trade union rights and human rights. They have been very aware of the risks and dangers this entails for them but the struggle and fight for fundamental rights and high ideals has been important for them even with the risk for being imprisoned.

The arrests come in the wake of the ILO’s Committee on Freedom of Association which at its March meeting expressed sharp criticism of Belarus for failing to implement the recommendations made by the ILO’s Committee of Inquiry back in 2004. Several of the union leaders who over the years have testified in the ILO about the conditions in Belarus are among those arrested.

The BASTUN denounce in the strongest terms those unacceptable measures and deprivation of liberty for the leaders and officials of the independent trade union movement in Belarus and demands the immediate release of all union leaders and representatives in detention. We also call on the member states of the CBSS, their governments and parliaments, as well as all relevant European and International organisations and institutions, and intergovernmental organisations to take measures and to intervene to secure the Belarussian trade union officials safety and immediate release.

We also urge the ITUC and PERC to set up an immediate campaign, with participation of global trade union federations, aiming to support the Belarussian independent trade union movement as well as giving the imprisoned trade union colleagues direct support to be released.

