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BELARUS: Belarusian President and national TV journalists stigmatise human rights defenders on TV

Paris-Geneva, May 4, 2011. *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), strongly condemns the slandering declarations made on Belarusian television by President Aliaksandr Lukashenko and journalists of various national TV channels, including STV and ONT, against human rights defenders.*

On April 13, 2011, two days after the bomb attack in the Minsk subway, President Lukashenko made a televised speech broadcast on all Belarusian TV channels, in which he questioned who could be behind the attack, adding that “*there [was] a fifth column in the country*”, and that “*one has to show the real face of all these bandits among the people*”. He later pointed that in the aftermath of this massacre, the persons who asked the European Parliament to take sanctions against Belarus were guilty to “*dance on the corpses of their compatriots*”. There are strong reasons to believe that President Lukashenko was actually referring to Belarusian human rights defenders who have been active at the level of the European Union on the question of sanctions, as was the case most recently of Mr. **Ales Bialiatski**, President of the Human Rights Centre “Viasna” and Vice-President of FIDH.

On April 12 and 13, 2011, stigmatising statements from journalists belonging to various national TV channels were also intensively broadcasted. In particular, a journalist from STV intervened in the “24 Hours” TV show, in which he stated that “*in the context of the tragedy in Belarus, there has been an astonishing discussion in Strasbourg, in the framework of the “political affairs” of the Council of Europe. When talking about the situation in Belarus, no discussion took place on the terrorist attack, the assistance to victims, or the status of the investigation. If the president of one of the commissions, Mr. Von Sydow, briefly mentioned the attack, a certain Bialiatski and a certain Tonkacheva have, for their part, complained about their own misfortune: “the rights of the Belarusian opposition are not respected, and we therefore have to adopt economic sanctions against Belarus”. What follows is not hard to understand: when we are in difficulty, when these bastards kill our people, it is impossible to behave like the chief of the opposition, Mr. Bialiatski, who has cynically wiped his feet on his compatriots*”.

The Observatory firmly denounces these statements, which clearly aim at stigmatising civil society and human rights defenders in Belarus and at assimilating them to political opponents. The Observatory calls on the authorities to respect the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights instruments ratified by Belarus.

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