



**ONLY BY EMAIL**

President Alexander Lukashenko,  
BELARUS

Email: [contact@president.gov.by](mailto:contact@president.gov.by)

Amsterdam, 22 March 2017

Subject: Sentencing of lawyer Oleg Volchek

Your Excellency,

Lawyers for Lawyers is an independent, non-profit and non-political foundation that seeks to promote the proper functioning of the rule of law by pursuing freedom and independence of the legal profession. Lawyers for Lawyers is concerned about the sentencing of lawyer Oleg Volchek.

Oleg Volchek is a prominent human rights lawyer and director of the non-governmental organisation Pravovaya Pomoshch Naseleniyu (Legal Aid to Population). He defends political rights and fights against the use of torture and bad conditions in Belarusian detention facilities.

According to our information, Mr. Volchek was charged with 'taking part in an illegal mass event', under art. 23.34 part 1 of the Administrative code, after taking part in the demonstration that took place in Minsk on 17 February 2017. One more demonstration took place on 15 March 2017. Through these peaceful protests participants called on the authorities to withdraw Presidential Decree No 3 on the 'Prevention of Social Dependence'. The law targets and imposes a tax of around USD 250 on Belarusians who have worked less than half of the year and who have not registered at the country's labour offices.

Mr. Volchek learnt about being charged by chance, when he was inquiring about the hearing of his client Mr. Alexander Lapitski who was last year sentenced to undergo psychiatric treatment. The Frunze district of the city of Minsk judge was the same judge who sentenced the above mentioned client and the judge who incidentally informed Mr. Volchek that he himself has a pending hearing in the administrative case against him. The hearing in the case against Mr. Volchek took place on 21 March 2017 in the Frunze district of the City of Minsk. According to our information, Mr. Volchek was sentenced to 13 days of imprisonment.



Lawyers for Lawyers – as well as various other organizations - fear that these acts of harassment against lawyer Oleg Volchek are connected to, and serve to curb his legitimate activities as an attorney.

In view of the above, we would like to draw your attention to UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers<sup>1</sup>, and more in particular Article 23, which reads:

*23. Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession.*

In view of the above, Lawyers for Lawyers respectfully urge you to immediately:

- Drop all charges against lawyer Oleg Volchek and put an end to all acts of harassment against him, including at the judicial level;
- Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights lawyers in Belarus are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter. We are confident that the government of Belarus will give this case the attention it deserves and we will continue to monitor this case closely.

On behalf of the President of Lawyers for Lawyers, Phon van den Biesen,

Yours sincerely,

LAWYERS FOR LAWYERS

Adrie van de Streek  
Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers provide a concise description of international norms relating to the key aspects of the right to independent counsel. The Basic Principles were unanimously adopted by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in Havana, Cuba on 7 September 1990. Subsequently, the UN General Assembly “welcomed” the Basic Principles in their ‘Human rights in the administration of justice’ resolution, which was adopted without a vote on 18 December 1990 in both the session of the Third Committee and the plenary session of the General Assembly.



Letters concerning the same topic were sent to:

- Minister of Justice of Belarus, Mr. Oleg Slizhevsky, Email: [kanc@minjust.by](mailto:kanc@minjust.by)

Copies of this letter were sent to:

- President of the Supreme Court of Belarus, Mr. Valiantsin Alehovich Sukala  
Email: [scjustrb@pmrb.gov.by](mailto:scjustrb@pmrb.gov.by)
- Administration of the Central District Court of Gomel, Email: [centr-gomel@court.by](mailto:centr-gomel@court.by)
- H.E. Mr. Yury Ambrazevich, Permanent Mission of Belarus to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, Email: [mission.belarus@ties.itu.int](mailto:mission.belarus@ties.itu.int)