2021

 **Mr. Oleg Slizhevsky**

 Minister of Justice of the Republic of Belarus

 10 Kollektornaya St.

 Minsk 220004

 **Republic of Belarus**

Dear Mr. Slizhevsky

As a member/supporter of ACAT-Switzerland, the Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture and the Death Penalty, I am writing to you regarding the current situation of

**human rights defenders and journalists in Belarus.**

Since September 2020, the Belarusian security services have increased the repression against human rights defenders and journalists. Mid-February 2021, at least 25 persons have seen their houses and offices searched and many have been arrested and detained under arbitrary pretexts, among them:

* **Pavel Sapelko, Andrei Poluda, Aliaksei Kolchyn, Barys Bukhel, Uladzimir Tselepun, Alena Masliukova, Natalya Satsunkevich, Dmitri Solovyov, Valentin Stefanovich, Alex Bialiatski, Leanid Sudalenka, Tatsiana Lasitsa and Maria Rabkova from the *Human Rights Centre Viasna*;**
* **Barys Haretski, Aleh Ageyeu and Andrei Bastunts from the *Belarussians Association of Journalists* (BAJ);**
* **Yevgenia Parashchenko from the *Boris Zvozkov Belarusian Human Rights House*.**

These citizens were only peacefully exercising their work as human rights defenders and using their rights to liberty of expression and assembly. Some of them face up to twelve years in prison.

Belarus is a Party to the UN Convention against Torture and to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and, as such, is bound to respect the provisions of those treaties, in particular the rights to liberty and security of a person, the right to hold opinions without interference and the right of assembly, as well as the right to be protected from any act of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. **I therefore urge you to:**

* **guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the above-mentioned persons and of all human rights defenders and journalists in Belarus under all circumstances;**
* **immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders and journalists arbitrarily detained because of their legitimate peaceful activities;**
* **put an end to all acts of harassment - including at the judicial level - against human rights defenders and journalists in Belarus, and ensure under any circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate activities without any hindrance and fear of reprisals.**

I thank you for the attention you will give to this concern.

Yours respectfully,

**Copy:** Mr. Aliaksandr Ganevich, Ambassador of Belarus, Embassy of the Republic of Belarus, Quartierweg 6, 3074 Muri bei Bern, Switzerland

*ACAT-Switzerland is a politically neutral and independent human rights organization affililated to the International Federation of ACAT (FIACAT), which has consultative status with the United Nations and participative Status with the Council of Europe.*

 Mr. Aliaksandr Ganevich

 Ambassador of Belarus

 Embassy of the Republic of Belarus

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