



FREEDOM NOW

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The Honorable Václav Havel (*In Memoriam*, 2006-2011)

MEDIA RELEASE

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ANDREI SANNIKOV AND ZMISTER BANDARENKA PARDONED IN BELARUS AFTER NEARLY 16 MONTHS IN DETENTION

On Saturday April 14, imprisoned Belarusian opposition leader and former diplomat Andrei Sannikov was released from prison under a pardon. The following day, April 15, Mr. Sannikov's former campaign aide, Zmister Bandarenka, was also released from prison. It is unclear if their early releases are subject to any restrictions.

Mr. Sannikov was brought to the penal colony's leadership office at around 5:30 pm on April 14 and told that he had received a pardon. After gathering his belongings, he was put on a train to Minsk where he was reunited with his wife, Iryna Khalip, and the couple's young son. His domestic lawyer, Andrei Varvachevitch announced his release late Saturday night.

On Sunday April 15, Mr. Bandarenka telephoned his wife, Volha, and told her that he had received a pardon and would be released from prison. He arrived in Minsk around 2:00 pm and was greeted by his wife, as well as Mr. Sannikov and his family.

"It is a relief that Mr. Sannikov and Mr. Bandarenka have been released after nearly 16 months of wrongful detention, particularly in light of the treatment they have endured," said Freedom Now Executive Director Maran Turner. "However, the international community must continue to demand that the remaining political prisoners in Belarus are released and that the officials who mistreated Mr. Sannikov and Mr. Bandarenka are held accountable."

Police arrested Mr. Sannikov and Mr. Bandarenka during the crackdown following Belarus' presidential elections in 2010, which were neither free nor fair. Mr. Sannikov and Mr. Bandarenka joined tens of thousands of Belarusians gathered in central Minsk after polls closed on December 19, 2010 for a peaceful demonstration. When Mr. Sannikov addressed the protesters, he urged them to remain peaceful in the face of provocations by individuals now widely believed to be government agents. However, police beat many of the peaceful protesters, including Mr. Sannikov, who was arrested along with hundreds of other demonstrators. Police arrested Mr. Bandarenka the following day at his home in Minsk.

Mr. Sannikov and Mr. Bandarenka were convicted after trials that failed to meet international standards for due process. Although prosecutors were unable to produce any evidence that Mr. Sannikov or Mr. Bandarenka engaged in any violence, the court sentenced Mr. Sannikov to five years in prison and Mr. Bandarenka to two years in prison.

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Our mission is to free prisoners of conscience through focused legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts.

Authorities repeatedly mistreated Mr. Sannikov and Mr. Bandarenka during their detentions. Guards forced Mr. Sannikov into stress positions for long periods of time despite injuries he sustained during his arrest. Guards also deprived him of sleep and exposed him to extreme cold. An official even threatened to harm Mr. Sannikov's family. Mr. Bandarenka suffered from a serious spinal cord injury, for which he was repeatedly denied care. After an international outcry, Mr. Bandarenka was able to undergo surgery; however, his health continued to deteriorate in detention as prison authorities regularly disregarded the advice of his doctors.

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