



PRESS RELEASE

The historic first laureate of the Václav Havel Award for Human Rights

Strasbourg/Prague, 30.09.2013

At 12:30 today CET, Jean-Claude Mignon announced at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg that **Ales Bialiatski** had been named the historic first laureate of the Václav Havel Award for Human Rights.

ALES BIALIATSKI (Belarus)

From the start of the 1980s, Ales Bialiatski, a young Belarusian writer and graduate of the Gomel University Faculty of History and Philology, joined the national democratic movement. While the world was still divided by the Iron Curtain, he became a founding member of the Belarusian Popular Front. Helping to create a young writers' association that he chaired for several years, Ales went on to join the Belarusian Writers' Union. Later, he organised the first demonstrations against totalitarianism.

This commitment led to his imprisonment in 1988, marking the start of a long series of arrests and harassment.

In 1996, in the face of the increasing repression of the Lukachenko regime, Ales Bialiatski created the Human Rights Centre Viasna. In 2007, just three years after joining International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Ales Bialiatski was elected its Vice-President, the first representative of the former Soviet countries to be elected to the FIDH International Board.

CIVIC SOCIETY: FREEDOM IS NOT TO BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED

In honour of the first laureate of the Václav Havel Award for Human Rights, the Václav Havel Library is organising in cooperation with the Charter 77 Foundation a one-day conference entitled Civic Society: Freedom Is Not To Be Taken For Granted on **Wednesday 2 October**. The conference will be attended by human rights advocates from around the world, including the award's laureate, and is open to the general public. The conference will be held in English with simultaneous translation into Czech and Russian.

[Free registration for the conference](#)

[Conference programme](#)

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND ALES BIALIATSKI

Ales Bialiatski is regarded by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience, i.e., as somebody who has been imprisoned for their opinions and convictions. The Czech section of Amnesty International is fighting for Ales with its Just 3 Minutes to Change their Lives campaign – www.3minutystaci.cz – aimed at collecting as many signatures as possible on a petition calling on the Belarusian authorities to release him.

VÁCLAV HAVEL AWARD FOR HUMAN RIGHTS FINALISTS

A total of 27 individuals and organisations were nominated for the award. At a meeting in Prague on 26 August 2013, a selection committee headed by Jean-Claude Mignon, the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), selected a short-list of three finalists: Ales Bialiatski (Belarus), the Georgia Young Lawyers' Association (Georgia) and the Rights Defence Network (China).

GEORGIAN YOUNG LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION (Georgia)

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association has been conducting human rights protection activities since 1994. Their activities are focused on the the following strategic fields:

Legal aid – Legal aid center of GYLA in Tbilisi and seven regions of Georgia provide legal assistance to tenth of thousands of citizens (consultation, preparation of legal documents and court representation in case of need). Special attention is paid to the facts, where human rights are violated by government, or administrative body. **Vulnerable groups** – GYLA pays special attention to protection of rights of religious, ethnic, sexual minorities, people with limited abilities, those, who live beyond the poverty line. **Prisoners' rights**– GYLA is actively involved in monitoring of penitentiary systems. Special attention is paid to facts of torture and mistreatment. **Participation in legal drafting** – GYLA conducts constant monitoring of legislative process and prepares its own legal opinions on every draft, which is important for human rights. **Raising awareness** – There are many people in Georgia, who have no information about their rights – GYLA's offices in the regions have been implementing campaigns for raising awareness throughout Georgia (trainings, seminars and field meetings to ensure awareness of local groups and support democratic involvement of them in the country's political and social life). **Strategic litigation** – first, denunciation of discriminative legal acts, or acts, which violate human rights through trial at constitutional court of Georgia, and the second, representation of Georgian citizens at European Court of Human Rights. **Protection of Media Interests** – on the base of GYLA has been established Media Legal Defense Center, which ensures protection of rights and interests of different media sources and journalists.

RIGHTS DEFENCE NETWORK (China)

Launched in China in 2005, the Rights Defense Network (wei quan wang, WQW) has been the most active and effective human rights group to operate inside the country ever since. The group, which cannot be legally registered with the government because the government disapproves of it, is composed of activists, lawyers, journalists, writers, dissidents, and labor organizers who maintain loose association in physical space and use the Internet as their main tool for collecting, sharing, and disseminating information, organizing actions, and pursuing

advocacy. The Network has played a vital role in monitoring, updating, and providing in-depth analyses of the rights situation inside China. It informs the public inside the country as well as the Chinese-language media overseas and the international community.

VÁCLAV HAVEL AWARD FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Václav Havel Award for Human Rights honours extraordinary efforts in the field of the protection of human rights in Europe and beyond. It is bestowed annually by the [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) (PACE) in cooperation with the [Václav Havel Library](#) and the [Charter 77 Foundation](#) and comes with a EUR 60,000 monetary reward.

[The Václav Havel Award for Human Rights](#)

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