
Ina Kulej

The Solidarity Committee Activities

The Solidarity Committee in defence of victims of political persecution began operation on 5 April 2006. It was established in response to the authorities' harassment of opposition supporters during and in the wake of the 2006 presidential election.

The committee has the following functions:

- assistance to persecuted students;
- assistance to victimized employees;
- medical rehabilitation for victims;
- raising public awareness of the Solidarity campaign.

The committee is formed of the leaders of prominent civic organizations:

- Aleś Bialacki of the Viasna human rights centre;
- Ludmiła Hraznova of the Human Rights Alliance;
- Alena Tałapiła of the Association of Belarusian Students;
- Andrej Vituška of the Association of Belarusian Medical Workers;
- Ała Karol of the Parents' Solidarity Committee.

The Solidarity Committee Board decides on the priorities and objectives of the committee. It considers applications for assistance and decides on individual forms of assistance. Decisions are made on the basis of the following papers:

- court rulings;
- certificates given on release from jail;
- a document from court that orders a person to pay a fine;
- a document from the police confirming that a teenager is registered as a "problem child";
- a document confirming that a person was sacked from work;
- medical file records;
- media reports;

and also on the basis of face-to-face interviews with victims. The evidence presented is kept in the board's database.

The committee is responsible for all day-to-day work that includes the following:

- compiling a file for each victim;
- updating the database;

- staying in touch with the victims who applied to the committee for assistance;
- preparing statistical and analytical materials;
- conducting a dialogue with foreign ambassadors accredited in Belarus;
- preparing and holding meetings with victims and their relatives;
- corresponding with donors that assist victims of persecution in Belarus (universities, non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups and individuals from various countries);
- keeping the media informed of its activity;
- conducting the Solidarity awareness campaign in Belarus and abroad.

In all, 678 people asked for help within the first three months of the committee's operation, including 372 students, 122 unemployed persons, 41 persons looking for opportunities for post-diploma training, 17 individuals willing to enroll on internship programs, and 126 individuals who said they needed medical rehabilitation and financial assistance.

The committee provided specific assistance to the following categories:

1. On 1 June 2006, 233 students expelled from universities, persecut-

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chief of the Help For Repressed Persons "Solidarity" Committee

ed secondary school students and children of harassed activists began studies in Poland under the Kastus Kalinouski Program.

2. The committee has proposed students and persons who need post-diploma education for further training programs in various countries: 12 individuals in the Czech Republic, 10 individuals in Germany, seven in Estonia, three in Norway, two in France and 17 in Ukraine. It keeps working closely with the Czech, Estonian and Ukrainian ambassadors to select participants for further training programs in their countries. The committee is preparing proposals for the Romanian embassy following the Romanian government's announcement of an appropriate program.
3. The committee is compiling a list of 70 workers for temporary employment with a building company in Poland.
4. It has reached agreement with non-governmental organizations in the Czech Republic and Poland willing to enroll 10 and 20 persons, respectively, on internship programs.
5. The committee offered financial assistance to 12 victims using money provided by various religious groups based in Minsk.
6. Protestant groups pledged to assist on a regular basis 25 families of victims facing financial difficulties.
7. Three children of regional leaders aged between 10 and 14 were sent to the Belarusian-Italian integration camp in Radaskavicy to recuperate.
8. The committee reached a preliminary agreement with the Ukrainian embassy to send 10 persons to Ukrainian health resorts for medical rehabilitation.
9. The committee sent more than 100 letters of moral support to victims' families as part of the Solidarity campaign.



Andrej Lankievič

Interview with a young man willing to participate in the Kalinouski Programme for repressed students.

10. Committee members held five meetings with relatives of political prisoners, members of the unregistered organizations Partnership, Malady Front, and others.
11. The committee distributed 20 books signed by writers Uładzimir Arłou, Volha Ipatava and academic Radzim Harecki and five CDs signed by rock star Lavon Volski among pro-democracy activists.
12. The committee delivered an open letter addressed by relatives of victims to participants at the G-8 sum-

mit in St. Petersburg and to respective embassies.

13. The committee members held a news conference to publicize the appeal to the G-8 leaders.

Protests in Belarus will gain strength. Once people overcome fear, they become actively involved in the "For Freedom" movement. Pro-democracy forces have a challenge to instill confidence in activists who should be able to rely on the support of fellow Belarusians and the international community in the event of persecution.