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May 21, 2024

Belarus: Criminal case against human rights defender in exile Barys Haretski launched

On May 17, 2024, Belarusian law enforcement officers raided the apartment in Minsk, Belarus, where prominent journalist and human rights defender **Barys Haretski** is registered. Following the raid, the authorities launched a criminal case against the human rights defender; it is not clear yet what the grounds for his investigation are.

[Barys Haretski](#) is a prominent Belarusian journalist, human rights defender, and the Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), an organization dedicated to protecting and promoting freedom of speech, freedom of information, and the rights of journalists and the media in Belarus. In 2023, BAJ and its website, social media accounts, and logo were added to the Republican List of Extremist Content by the Belarusian authorities. Barys Haretski was forced to leave Belarus in 2021 after being targeted by the Belarusian authorities, due to his human rights advocacy work in support of press freedom.

On May 17 2024, Belarusian law enforcement officers arrived at the apartment in Minsk where Barys Haretski is registered. The authorities arrived on site with a warrant to raid the apartment and seize all the human rights defender's belongings. Barys Haretski confirmed that none of his belongings were in the apartment, as he fled Belarus three years ago. The human rights defender also reported that he believed that the reason behind the raid and seizure of his belongings was a criminal case that the Belarus authorities have launched against him. However, it is unclear what the grounds for criminal proceedings against the human rights defender are.

This is yet another case of Belarusian authorities targeting human rights defenders, who were forced into exile after the 2020 crackdown on human rights defenders and civil society. In 2023 the Investigative Committee of the Homiel region [opened a criminal case](#) against Belarusian human rights defender Leanid Sudalenka. He is facing charges for allegedly 'facilitating extremist activity,' an offense envisaged by Article 361-4 of the Belarusian Criminal Code. In March 2024, the Investigative Committee in Belarus initiated special proceedings against human rights defender Leanid Sudalenka, paving the way for a trial in absentia.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned with the targeting of prominent journalist and human rights defender Barys Haretski, and believes that he is being targeted for his legitimate and peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders continues to raise its concern over the continuous persecution and intimidation of Belarusian human rights defenders and independent journalists, including those in exile.

Front Line Defenders urges the Belarusian Authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally cease harassment against human rights defender and journalist Barys Haretski;
2. Immediately and unconditionally cease the investigation and close the criminal case launched against Barys Haretski;

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all journalists and human rights defenders in Belarus can carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with Belarus' international human rights obligations and commitments.

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