

18 September 2020

### **Belarus: Maria Rabkova arbitrarily detained**

On 17 September 2020, woman human rights defender **Maria Rabkova** was detained in Minsk as part of a criminal investigation opened in relation to ongoing protests in the country. Maria Rabkova's husband Vadim Zharomsky was arrested along side her but later released.

Maria Rabkova is a woman human rights defender and coordinator of the Volunteer Service at Human Rights Centre Viasna (HRC Viasna). Together with Viasna volunteers, Maria Rabkova has been monitoring peaceful assemblies that have broken out across Belarus since the announcement of the 2020 Presidential election results on 9 August. She has also been documenting cases of torture and other ill-treatment against detained protesters. The woman human rights defender played an active role in the independent election observation campaign "Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections".

On the evening of 17 September 2020, as Maria Rabkova and her husband Vadim Zharomsky were on their way home, several minibuses pulled up alongside them. Officers from the Main Directorate for Combating Organised Crime and Corruption (GUBOPiK) exited the vehicles and pushed the defender and her husband's face against the ground. The couple were informed that Maria Rabkova was being detained as part of a criminal investigation opened under para. 3 of Article. 293 of the Criminal Code of Belarus for "education or other preparation of persons for participation in mass riots, or financing such activities".

Maria Rabkova and Vadim Zharomsky were placed in different minibuses. Vadim Zharomsky was brought to their apartment where the officers conducted a search. During the search, equipment, personal belongings and money were seized. Afterwards, Vadim Zharomsky was brought to the office of GUBOPiK where the officers put a sack on his head, questioned him and threatened that they would take him to a temporary detention centre. Later he was released and told that he should return for questioning the following day.

Maria Rabkova was brought to a detention center on Okrestina Street. According to information from the defender's colleagues, the criminal investigation is being conducted by the Office of the Investigative Committee for Minsk. The defender's lawyer was informed that the defender would be brought in for questioning on 18 September 2020 at 3pm local time.

Members of HRC Viasna have been [under pressure since early May 2020](#), with many local representatives arbitrarily detained and subjected to judicial harassment or administrative arrests.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the detention of Maria Rabkova as well as the harassment of her husband. Her arrest follows a [number](#) of acts of reprisal against and

judicial harassment of human rights defenders from the law enforcement representatives in Belarus since the results of the 2020 Presidential elections were announced on 9 August. Front Line Defenders expresses concern that these actions may have a chilling effect on the promotion and protection of human rights in the Belarus, and may be uncondusive to the creation of a safe and enabling environment in which defenders can carry out their work.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Belarus to:**

1. Take all necessary measures to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Maria Rabkova and guarantee her physical and psychological security and integrity, as well as that of her husband and relatives;
2. Immediately drop all charges against Maria Rabkova as it is believed that they are solely motivated by her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
3. Return the items and money confiscated during the police inspection, as they are manifestly not linked to any criminal activity;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Belarus are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.