**Joint statement**

**concerning**

**intimidation and arrests of Belarusian human rights defenders**

**exercising their professional duties**

We, Belarusian and international human rights organisations, are alarmed at the increasing cases of intimidation and arrests of Belarusian human rights defenders exercising their professional duties. At present, among others in detention are Maria Rabkova, coordinator of the volunteer service of the Human Rights Centre “Viasna”, and long-term human rights observer with the Belarusian Helsinki Committee Leonid Markhotko. The latter has been cumulatively sentenced to 30 days of administrative arrest. Other instances of intimidation and arrests of the Belarusian human rights defenders are regularly documented and publicised.

On 15 October 2020, a march of persons with disabilities was scheduled to start at 14.00 in Minsk. The information about the march had been advertised in the social media. Oleg Grablevsky, lawyer representing the Office on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was mandated by the Office to conduct human rights monitoring of the march. The objective of the monitoring exercise was to provide the overall evaluation of the situation, including actions to prevent all forms of violence against persons with disabilities as foreseen by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified by the Republic of Belarus. However, Oleg never managed to commence his monitoring mission. As he was returning from his human rights-related professional duties, Oleg was detained and taken in an unknown location. His whereabouts became known more than 24 hours later, on 16 October, as the result of numerous calls to the Internal Affairs’ departments. At present, Oleg is detained at the Centre of temporary detentions of Minsk Executive Committee’s Main Internal Affairs Directorate located at 1-y pereulok Okrestina, 36A.

* Considering that Oleg Grablevsky’s actions are of exclusively peaceful nature and directed at the promotion and protect the human rights of persons with disabilities,
* Underlining the legitimacy of such actions and their protection under the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and international human rights acts, including the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998,
* Noting that the instances of persecution of human rights defender in Belarus have recently increased in the Republic of Belarus, as frequently reported by independent human rights organisations,
* Recalling the need to promote and protect human rights, including the right of all persons with disabilities to support for participation in public life,

We demand:

1. Immediate end to all intimidation and persecution of Belarusian human rights defenders exercising their legitimate professional duties, particularly persecution of our colleague Oleg Grablevsky, and we demand his immediate unconditional release;
2. Full respect of national and international obligations to guarantee protection to all human rights defenders and their activities.

Signatories: Belarusian and international human rights organisations

Office for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Center for Legal Transformation (Lawtrend)

Advisory center on contemporary international practices and their legal implementation “Human Constanta”

FORB Initiative

Belarusian Helsinki Committee

Human Rights Center "Viasna"

Legal Initiative

Belarusian Documentation Center

Barys Zvozskau Belarusian Human Rights House