



2030 M Street, NW, Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20036
Tel : (202) 728-5500
Fax: (202) 728-5520
www.ndi.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 6, 2006

STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE ON THE CURRENT SITUATION IN BELARUS

Around the world, citizens have organized in a nonpartisan way to monitor elections as a means of promoting confidence and participation in the electoral process. The right of citizens to monitor their elections is a fundamental democratic principle, and over the past 25 years the National Democratic Institute is proud to have worked with nonpartisan monitoring groups in more than 65 countries in every region of the world.

In Belarus, civic activists have also sought to monitor their elections, a right which is guaranteed to them under Article 13 of the Belarusian electoral code and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) 1990 Copenhagen Document.

In 2001, the OSCE along with NDI provided support to a coalition of nonpartisan domestic monitors who observed the 2001 presidential poll, and NDI assisted the efforts of more than 3,000 Belarusian nonpartisan monitors for the 2004 parliamentary elections. These monitors acted with integrity and professionalism, although their attempts to register as a nonpartisan election monitoring organization had been rejected by the Belarusian authorities. A year later, many of the same monitors once again sought to register a citizen initiative called Partnership in order to monitor the upcoming presidential poll. Their request for registration was once again denied.

Two weeks ago, on February 21, several of these civic activists were arrested and their offices and homes raided. The KGB accused them of “slandering the president and illegally running an unregistered organization.” In its propaganda campaign the Belarusian authorities falsely accused Partnership of organizing fraudulent exit polls and planning a violent uprising after the election. The activists were formally charged on March 3 and remain in detention.

NDI Chairman Madeleine K. Albright made the following statement:

“The National Democratic Institute deplores this attempt by the Belarusian authorities to deny the basic rights of their citizens to peacefully monitor the March 19 presidential election.

We condemn the recent arrests of civic activists and the accusations leveled against Partnership, whose only interest is to promote a democratic election process and peacefully monitor that process.

By refusing to register nonpartisan monitoring groups and restricting their access to assistance from outside organizations, Belarus is violating its commitments as a member state of the OSCE and other international human rights instruments to which it is a party.

We call on the government of Belarus to immediately release those detained and allow them to continue their rightful monitoring effort without interference.

The Belarus government cannot expect to earn international respect if it does not respect international norms.”

Contact : Jean Freedberg (202) 728-5527 jfreedberg@ndi.org