

Geneva, 24 January 2022

RELEASE MARIA KOLESNIKOVA IMMEDIATELY!

(International campaign to release a human rights defender, Member of the Governing Board of Disability Council International)

1. Maria Kolesnikova a distinguished member of the Governing Body of Disability Council International and a ferocious defender of human rights and in particular of persons with disabilities in Belarus and the world all over, was abducted in September 2020, in an attempt to silence her moral voice as the people's leader of the spontaneous democratic movement protesting the rigged elections in Belarus that saw Mr. Lukashenko attempting to continue remaining in power now more than 20 years, against the people's will.
2. After her abduction by masked police agents, in September 2020, Maria Kolesnikova was subsequently placed in a car bound for Ukraine, in an attempt to force her out of the borders of Belarus (forced exile), in order to later accuse her of having fled the country, thus betraying persons with disabilities and other citizens who joined her by thousands in protest of the rigged elections, in peaceful demonstrations for democracy, rule of law and constitutional order in Belarus.
3. But Maria Kolesnikova, a true human rights defender as she has accustomed us to be, ripped up her passport at the border with Ukraine and defying the regime returned to Belarus. She was immediately arrested again, and placed in illegal detention for a year without formal accusation. In September 2021, she was jailed for 11 years, following fake kangaroo justice proceedings. Suffices to say that these kangaroo justice fake trials lasted less than a month. This is when criminal proceedings involving possible sentences of up to 11 years, rarely can feet within six months of proceedings. Here it all started 12 August 2021 and ended in a sentence on 6 September 2021. (Not surprising then, that the fake trial was held in secret out of the public sight. This is typical of kangaroo justice fake trials, when sentences are already imposed even before the start of the trial)), in the best traditions of despotic regimes, the likes of Pinochet in Chile in the past, the Junta regime in Myanmar or the despotic "father of the nation" in North Korea. Maria Kolesnikova has since been held incommunicado in prison, unable to write or receive correspondence, let alone play the flute to practice her skills of acclaimed musician. She has been held like this in inhuman conditions potentially deteriorating her health since then, almost one and a half year in total since the time of her abduction in September 2020.
4. These are tremendous, unimaginable human rights violations, and we have been appealing to the Belarusian authorities to release our Board member immediately and unconditionally (i.e. without requesting her again to accept a forced exile, or silencing of human rights abuses, including against persons with disabilities who have been also jailed on occasions for participation in these peaceful pro-democracy rallies organised by Maria Kolesnikova. (We have made submissions in the past to Mr.Lukashenko to release these leaders of organisations of persons with disabilities, after which people were eventually released).

5. This is the time for Mr. Lukashenko to do the same and release Maria Kolesnikova our Board member. And we will continue appealing to all the international community, the UN, the EU, Council of Europe and to every country in the world to join us in pressuring the authorities of Belarus to immediately release Maria Kolesnikova.

As Maria Kolesnikova will turn 40 y.o. on 24 April, Mr. Lukashenko should release Maria Kolesnikova immediately. Maria Kolesnikova should celebrate her 40th birthday at home with her father Mr. Kolesnikov, sister Tatyana, friends and colleagues. She committed no crime in the eyes of the civilized nations of the world to which Belarus pleads to belong. It is time to show that Belarus belongs indeed in there too. Silencing voices by jailing citizens is not the best way to go about solving nation's problems, only dialogue and ears to accept the legitimate society demands- the right way forward for Belarus.

6. The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this instrument of customary human rights law, binding on Belarus, as on all countries of the world, clearly states that people in a democratic society have a right to express their voices and dissent peacefully. No one can be held accountable for expressing his/her voice and dissent peacefully in a democratic society (when it doesn't involve the use of lethal force).

The Belarusian authorities cannot accuse our Board member of using force or appealing to use force against the authorities. All what the people demanded was new fair elections in Belarus, after tremendous irregularities were observed and exposed during the last presidential elections, and for this reason, rightfully so condemned widely internationally.

7. As we are approaching the 40th birthday of Maria Kolesnikova, and after one and half year of illegal detention, let us all say it loudly together to demand immediate release from this unlawful incarceration before 24 April 2022 (it is all in the hands of Mr. Lukashenko to release Maria Kolesnikova immediately and join the community of democratic nations):

"Mr. Lukashenko, release Maria Kolesnikova, a human rights defender, immediately!"

The trial was fake and the accusations false. Maria Kolesnikova never used or appealed to use force against the authorities of Belarus. Her only "weapon" is a flute; second, her human rights moral voice on behalf of the people of Belarus, on behalf of persons with disabilities in Belarus; and third, the act of ripping up her passport to avoid forced exile from her own country, (none of these are criminal offences in any of the democratic societies of the world).

Release Maria kolesnikova Immediately!

Please follow us on our website, facebook page and twitter for more details about this international campaign and for recollections of Maria Kolesnikova's dramatic abduction, arrest and incommunicado imprisonment after a fake kangaroo justice trial:

<https://disabilitycouncilinternational.org/about-us>

FBK: www.facebook.com/disabcouncil

Some video sources with the events:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwcy2YYg1y4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8TIJjuGRDQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUullUIhbXQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtWnYJIoV1U>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykO5MchQQQg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnmCV3pZmt8>

A short bio information on Maria Kolesnikova can be found widely in public sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Kalesnikava

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Anna LACHOWSKA 

Chairperson,
Disability Council International
