



Postadres Postbus 9208, 3506 GE Utrecht

President
Alyaksandr Lukashenka
Administratsia Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus ul.Karla
Marksa, 38
220016 Minsk,
Belarus
E-mail: contact@president.gov.by

Hoofdbestuur

T 0900 9690 (lokaal tarief)
F 030 66 30 000

www.fnvbondgenoten.nl

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030-2738447

Ons kenmerk
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Onderwerp
Solidarity letter BKDP

Dear President Lukashenka,

FNV Bondgenoten, the largest trade union in The Netherlands in the private sector, is very concerned about the recent developments in Belarus regarding Trade Union- and Labour rights. We address you herewith about the following. We are concerned about the failure of your regime to respect labour and trade union rights of workers in Belarus for many years. A recent development however is especially alarming. In December 2012 the Belarusian authorities issued decree "9 "On additional measures to develop the timber industry". This Decree takes away the the right of workers in the wood processing industry to quit their jobs. Employees wishing to leave the company against the will of their employers have to pay back all benefits previously received.

In our view, this Decree not only violates the Constitution of Belarus, which prohibits forced labor, but also the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 29 on Forced Labour. Article Two of that convention defines forced labor as all involuntary work or service exacted under the menace of a penalty. With the issue of Decree "9 "On additional measures to develop the timber industry" Belarus introduces forced labour in the country.

In February, an appeal was sent to the presidents of Russia and Belarus which was signed by the President of the Confederation of Labor of Russia, Boris Kravchenko, the head of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, Mikhail Shmakov and the chairman of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP) Alyaksandr Yaroshuk, in which they urge for the abolition of Decree "9. FNV Bondgenoten has been supporting and cooperating with the independent Union movement in Belarus for many years and supports the urgent appeal of the unions.

In view of the above, we urge you to intervene, in order to respect fundamental international labour standards, and abolish Presidential decree ¶ 9 "On additional measures to develop the timber industry".

We also ask for your attention for the refusal of the Belarussian authorities to extend visa to our FNV Bondgenoten shopsteward Gesina Hoogsteen and to Trade Union activists Anna Sofia Ensing and Wilhelmina Jansen of NGO TIE-Netherlands, thus preventing them from travelling to Belarus for a study and training mission to cooperate with the Belarus Congress of Independent Trade Unions BKDP. This refusal of visa hinders the exercise of active trade union freedom and thus violates the various international human rights treaties and ILO conventions on freedom of organisation. We ask you to ensure free travelling of Trade Union activists to Belarus and to stop hindering active trade union freedom and cooperation.

We look forward to receiving your positive reply.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henk van der Kolk', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Henk van der Kolk
President FNV Bondgenoten