



Sydney, 11 April 2021

**Open Letter of the Federation of Polish Organizations
in New South Walls, Australia to Belarusian authorities.**

The Federation of Polish Associations in NSW Australia incorporates several cultural, social and educational organisations. Being a minority in the Australian multicultural society, we are very fortunate to be able to maintain our freedom in cultivating our Polish cultural, religious, historical and patriotic celebrations. They are often held outside of the Polish facilities, in Australian public places – community halls, cathedrals and parks. As the organisers of such **events** in Australia, we can imagine the pain and injustice suffered by our Polish brothers and sisters in Belarus. They are being persecuted for simply expressing their historical belonging to the Polish culture and trying to celebrate their traditions.

We demand the immediate release of Anna Paniszewa, Andżelika Borys, Andrzej Poczobut, Maria Tizkowska and Irena Biernacka, and the cessation of pressure and intimidation against members of the Polish minority in Belarus.

On March 11 **Anna Paniszewa** Director and the Co-Founder of the Romuald Traugutt Polish Scout Social School in Brest was brutally arrested under the pretext of inciting racial, national, religious, or social hatred. The arrest is in fact, a flagrant violation of the rights of the Polish National Minority in Belarus to cultivate its own culture, history, tradition, and language, as guaranteed by international treaties signed by Republic of Belarus. On March 10, the authorities opened a criminal case to investigate an event held at the Romuald Traugutt Scout School in Brest.

On March 25, the Prosecutor General's Office of Belarus said that it had opened a criminal case against **Andżelika Borys**, chairwoman of the Union of Poles in Belarus, and three other members of the organization **Andrzej**

Poczobut, Maria Tyszkowska, Irena Biernacka. The activists faced charges under Part 3 of Article 130 of the Criminal Code, “intentional actions aimed at inciting national and religious hostility on the grounds of national, religious, linguistic and other social affiliation, as well as the rehabilitation of Nazism, committed by a group of persons”.

Andżelika Borys was detained on March 23, and on March 24, a judge of the Lieninski District Court of Hrodna sentenced her to 15 days of administrative detention for violating the procedure of organizing and holding mass events, namely for arranging the annual festival of arts and crafts “Hrodna Kaziuki 2021”.

On March 25, the home of another member of the Union of Poles in Belarus, journalist Andrzej Poczobut, was searched and IT equipment confiscated, including two laptops and hard drives, seven old telephones, as well as conference participant badges, Polish-language documents, including his daughter’s papers, awards and others. Books in Polish were also confiscated during the search. Poczobut himself was detained and taken to the central office of the Investigative Committee, where he was interrogated and then placed in a pre-trial detention center in Minsk. Later, police raided the offices of the Union of Poles in Lida and Vaŭkavysk and detained Maria Tyszkowska and Irena Biernacka. It also known that the prosecutor’s offices are inspecting the syllabi of the Polish language courses and running a check of teachers and students, including minors, attending private Polish language schools.

We are convinced that punishment for expressing an opinion on historical facts is incompatible with the obligations of State parties to respect freedom of expression enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Restrictions on freedom of opinion should not be imposed under any circumstances, while restrictions on the right to freedom of expression should not go beyond the requirements of paragraph 3 of Art. 19 and Art. 20 of the Covenant.

Criminal prosecution of **Andżelika Borys, Andrzej Poczobut, Maria Tyszkowska, Anna Paniszewa and Irena Biernacka** is of apparent **politically motivated** nature, as it is aimed at creating the image of the enemy, both embodied by the Polish state as a whole and the Polish national minority, in particular, and therefore we will consider them as **political prisoners**.

In this regard, Federation of Polish Organizations in New South Wales, Australia, call on the authorities of the Republic of Belarus to:

- **immediately release Anna Paniszewa Director of Polish School in Brest, Andzelika Borys, Andrzej Poczobut, Maria Tiszkowska and Irena Biernacka, political prisoners and representatives of the Union of Poles in Belarus, and stop the criminal prosecution against them;**
- **stop pressure and persecution against members of the Polish national minority in Belarus;**
- **stop the use of Article 130 of the Criminal Code to punish for expressing opinions on historical facts, which is incompatible with the obligations of the Republic of Belarus under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.**

Adam Gajkowski - President of



Federation of Polish Associations

in New South Wales

Copy to:

Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Hon Alex Hawke MP, Minister of Home Affairs

The Hon Alex Hawke MP, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs

Andrzej Duda President of Republic of Poland

Mateusz Morawiecki, Prime Minister of Republic of Poland

Zbigniew Rau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Poland

Jan Dziejczak, the minister in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister responsible for *Polonia*.

Michał Kołodziejcki Ambassador of Republic of Poland to Australia

Monika Konczyk Consul General of Republic of Poland to Australia

Australian and Polish media