

Belarusian prisoner of conscience to be freed in October



A representative of Amnesty International met with prisoner of conscience, Maxim Dashuk, in September 2010. Maxim described how difficult it's been to live under 'restricted freedom' following his sentence in May 2008, at the age of 17.

On 15 June 2008 Maxim Dashuk was sentenced to one year and three months of further "restricted freedom" by the Maskouski district court in Minsk. He was convicted for violating the terms of earlier sentences imposed for their participation in the January 2008 anti-governmental protest and Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience. The young man had been among 11 people who were given sentences of up to two years of "restricted freedom" for "taking part in or organizing actions that gravely disturb public order".

Maxim has been sentenced to a total of two years and five months of 'restricted freedom'. He is now 19 years old and the last two and a half years have taken their toll on him. He spoke with Amnesty International about the pressure he has lived under since his initial sentence. He is required to work for eight hours a day, which he does, running his own business assembling furniture. He has two hours a day to carry out his daily chores and, apart from that, he is required to be at home.

At an age when his friends enjoy the usual teenage pastimes, Maxim has not been able to go to bars, restaurants, concerts or festivals, to enjoy sport or travel outside of Minsk since

May 2008 and has suffered from a lot of fear as a result of the restrictions placed on him. Police officers and inspectors are able to make unannounced visits to his home to check he is there and if he isn't, even due to unavoidable reasons, such as bad traffic, it can be counted as a violation of the conditions of his sentence. Three such violations may result in an extension of his sentence, which is exactly what happened to him in June 2009 and his original sentence was extended by another 15 months.

Maxim will have served his full sentence on 21 October 2010. He told Amnesty International that he will be very happy on that day and that he wants to travel abroad and see the sea. Maxim also said that solidarity is a very important source of support and that he would welcome cards from members to celebrate his freedom.

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