

ADF Requests Immediate Release of Imprisoned Belarus Christian Leaders

✖ The Alliance Defense Fund is asking for the immediate release of the co-chairs of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party who were arrested and imprisoned after expressing their views in a December 2010 Belarus national election.

The ADF sent letters on Monday to Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek asking for their support in the release of Pavel Sieviarynets and Vital Rymasheuski.

Rymasheuski, who ran for president, is one of the founders of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party. He has received a suspended sentence of two years in prison, while Sieviarynets was sentenced in December to three years at a hard labor camp.

AFP reports that the prisoners were found guilty of "actions disrupting social order," Judge Zhanna Lukovskaya said from the courtroom. However, the ADF says they were only arrested for expressing their Christian views.

"Christians shouldn't be punished simply for expressing their views. The free expression of ideas is a

basic human right that is protected by both Belarusian and European law," Roger Kiska, ADF legal counsel, says. "These two men were groundlessly arrested, denied their rights and sentenced to prison because of their views. They broke no laws and have only peacefully expressed themselves."

According to the ADF letters, Sieviarynets was kept in the KGB prison in Minsk following his arrest. He asked to meet with an Orthodox priest 10 times while imprisoned and was denied each request.

"These two men have actively devoted their political careers for the pursuit of religious freedom in Belarus and have been champions of democracy," the letters argue.

"Both men are friends and allies in religious liberty with the Alliance Defense Fund, and we are shocked and disturbed at the harshness of the sentences and the lack of rule of law or transparency."

Rymashevsky told AFP he plans to appeal and intends on taking part in other political campaigns and becoming president. "I came out of this stronger and more experienced," he says.