



# MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM

TRIBUTE TO LIBERTY



## Newsletter

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### Project Update and Site Visit by Ambassadors and Diplomats of Donor Countries

On October 13<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Tristan Landry, Deputy Director General, responsible for Monuments and Public art at Canadian Heritage, led a visit of the construction site of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism for a select group of Ambassadors and Deputy Heads of Mission representing key donor countries. This visit offered an excellent opportunity to provide an update on the progress at the construction site and to provide general background information on this initiative to newly arrived Ambassadors and diplomatic representatives.

For this occasion, his Excellency Kaspars Ozoliņš, recently appointed Ambassador of Latvia to Canada, had extended the invitation to fellow Eastern/Central European ambassadors. Joining him during this visit were: Her Excellency Mária Vass-Salazar, Ambassador of Hungary, His Excellency Vice Skračič, Ambassador of Croatia, His Excellency Margus Rava, Ambassador of Estonia, His Excellency Kaha Imnadze, Ambassador of Georgia, Mr. Krzysztof Lewandowski, Deputy Head of Mission for Poland and Mr. Jiří Muchka, Deputy Head of Mission for Czech Republic.

Representatives of the National Capital Commission and Pomerleau, the project's general contractor, were also present for this occasion.

During his project update, Mr. Landry informed the diplomatic representatives that the general contractor was now working on addressing a few minor deficiencies on site, mainly on the plinth. This work is expected to be completed by end of October. The installation of the granite on the site is also expected to be completed later this fall, prior to the site closing for the winter months. In parallel, the material for the Arc of Memory is currently being shipped to the contractor hired for this element of the project. All the material is expected to be received by the end of January 2023. In parallel, work on the assembly has also started. A mock-up exercise, which is necessary to ensure the stability, durability and buildability of the Arc of Memory, is currently scheduled for mid-March 2023. Once the mock-up has been reviewed and approved, work will proceed to finalise the assembly.

At the end of the visit, Ambassador Ozoliņš also graciously granted an interview regarding the meaning of the Memorial to Canadians of Latvian heritage. This interview by Canadian Heritage is to be a part of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism video which will be launched on social media in the lead up to the inauguration

of the monument. It will include construction milestones such as sod turning as well as interviews with several key people associated to this project.



## History Unhidden

### *A Tribute to Andrei Sakharov*

This December 14<sup>th</sup> will mark the 33<sup>rd</sup> year since the death of Andrei Sakharov, one of the most distinguished Soviet dissidents, who relentlessly spoke out against the injustices of the communist regime in the USSR. He was also the first chairman of the Memorial human rights organization, which was one of the recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022 and was banned by Russia's government the year earlier.

Sakharov was a nuclear physicist by profession, and was one of the developers of the Soviet thermonuclear bomb in the 1950s. Soon after, as he reflected upon the ethical implications of his work and of the nuclear arms race, he became a vocal opponent of nuclear proliferation, and appealed to the communist leadership to bring atomic bomb tests to an end.

In the 1960s, Sakharov began writing political essays which he circulated underground among other dissidents. In these, he openly called out the repressive policies of the Soviet Union, including the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the persecution of dissidents and the covering up of Stalin's terror.

Because of Sakharov's international reputation as a renowned scientist, the Soviet government did not dare to send him to prison, like it did with many others. However, the country's leadership launched a campaign of intimidation and defamation. Sakharov was demoted at work, the KGB continuously harassed him and regularly conducted searches in his apartment, and the Soviet press kept publishing slander against him.

In 1972, he married his second wife, Elena Bonner, also a dedicated human rights activist, who helped political prisoners even before she met Sakharov. Throughout his remaining years, she stood by his side and helped him tremendously.

While still free, Sakharov used this opportunity to do as much as he could for the cause he was committed to. Together with other dissidents, he founded the Moscow Committee of Human Rights, attended countless court hearings, and provided help individually to hundreds of political prisoners around the country. He kept writing essays, making public



statements, and organized many initiatives against the regime's injustices. All this work earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975.

When he condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, however, Sakharov was arrested and sent to forced exile to a closed off city of Gorky.

After Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 and began reforming the country towards a more democratic path, he released Sakharov a year later and allowed him to return to Moscow.



Photo: Houghton Library, Harvard University

Sakharov decided not lose a moment and worked relentlessly to help ensure positive change for his country. He started helping independent political organizations and human rights groups to form coordinated opposition to the ruling Communist Party.

In 1989 Sakharov was elected a delegate to the newly formed Soviet Deputy Congress and used this stage to call for democratic reform and to condemn the atrocities of the Communist system. On December 14, 1989, as he was working on a draft of the

country's new constitution and had a number of other important projects planned for the following days, he passed at night due to heart failure.

One of the notable projects he helped establish was Memorial, a human rights organization which investigated, commemorated and raised awareness about the crimes committed by the Soviet government. Despite the pressure and the intimidation from the Communist Party, Sakharov fought for the existence of Memorial and soon after his death, Elena Bonner helped ensure that it was officially registered.

Soon after, the activities of Memorial expanded to confront modern day human rights abuses and the rise of authoritarianism in Russia, including investigating Russia's war crimes in Chechnya in the 1990s. With Vladimir Putin's consolidation of power over the past two decades, the pressures on Memorial and its members intensified, which included arrests and even a murder, and eventually in 2021, the government banned it.

While we will never know the truth about Sakharov's death, there has been considerable speculation that it was not natural. One would be probably correct to say that had Sakharov been around for at least a few more years, Russia's subsequent history may have taken a much brighter turn.

*Submitted by Denis Tsarev*

## **History Unhidden**

### ***Nobel Peace Prize Winner Ales Bialiatski***

The unyielding Human Rights Defender from Biełaruś, Ales (Alieś) Bialiatski, has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2022 alongside the Ukrainian human rights organization Center for Civil Liberties and the Russian human rights organization Memorial.

We, the Biełarusians of all walks of life, are proud of this hero of our troubled times. I, Iryna Toŭścik, had the privilege of working alongside this remarkable person before I emigrated to Canada. Please allow me to highlight some deeds of Ales (Alieś) Bialiatski and his involvement in developing democracy in our beautiful Biełaruś (Belarus), currently occupied by

Putin's Russia and subjected by his crazy satellite, Laksandr (Alaksandr) Lukašenka. Let us begin with words of the Nobel Peace Prize Press Release committee: "By awarding the Nobel Peace Prize for 2022 to Ales Bialiatski, Memorial and the Center for Civil Liberties, the Norwegian Nobel Committee wishes to honour three outstanding champions of human rights, democracy, and peaceful co-existence in the neighbor countries Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. Through their consistent efforts in favor of humanist values, anti-militarism, and principles of law, this year's laureates have revitalized and honored Alfred Nobel's vision of peace and fraternity between nations – a vision most needed in the world today."



Ales (Alieś) Bialiatski is one of the most respected voices of Biełaruś (Belarus) in his home country and worldwide. He has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times for his courage and continued activities while fighting for democracy in Biełaruś. Ales Bialiatski is an Honorable Citizen of major cities in France, Italy, and the USA. He is also a prolific author who clearly states his political and democratically oriented position in his articles and books.

Bialiatski is the fourth person in the history of the Nobel Peace Prize to receive this award while imprisoned by Lukašenka's poisonous regime. Bialiatski's 60th birthday anniversary took place in prison. His wife and friends were not allowed to visit him even on this date. Bialiatski has been waiting for a trial for more than a year. He has been jailed since 2021 (after the mass protests against Lukašenka's regime and the dictator's falsifying the elections' results). Bialiatski might face a sentence of up to 12 years.

The Nobel committee recognized Alieś Bialiatski for advocating Human Rights in Biełaruś for nearly 30 years: "He has devoted his life to promoting democracy and peaceful development in his home country. Despite tremendous personal hardship, Mr. Bialiatski has not yielded an inch in his fight for human rights and democracy in Belarus," — said the head of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Berit Reiss-Andersen, announcing this year's three Nobel Peace Prize winners.

Presently, more than 1300 political prisoners of Biełarusian Human Rights defenders are in prison. Most of them are sentenced for decades—the conditions in Biełarusian prisons are below awful.

Alieś Bialiatski's courageous and consistent position in defense of human rights in Biełaruś and worldwide has been recognized by many international awards. Thus, among many, he received the following: in 2006 — the Swedish Peer Anger Prize, the Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award, the Homo Homini Award (awarded by Václav Havel); in 2011 — the Human Rights Defender of the Year Award, Norwegian Writers' Union Award for Freedom of Speech; in 2012 — the U.S. State Department's Award, Lech Wałęsa Award, Petra Kelly Award; in 2013 — PACE's Václav Havel Human Rights Prize; in 2020 — the Right Livelihood Award, to name a few.

Ales Bialiatski was born in 1962 to Biełarusian parents living in Finland (then occupied by the USSR). Three years later, they moved back to Biełaruś, to Svietlahorsk. He studied History and Biełarusian philology at the University. Back then, he developed as a human rights activist and defended the right of writers and artists to use their native Biełarusian language. In 1988 Ales Bialiatski was one of the founders of "Mortyralogue of Biełaruś," the public historical and educational fellowship in memory of

victims of communist repressions in Biełaruś (originally "Society in memory of victims of Stalinism"). "Martyralogue of Biełaruś" engages in educational and research activities and collects information about the crimes of the Soviet (Communists') occupation of Biełaruś.



In 1988, Bialatski co-organized the first peaceful mass demonstration in Soviet Biełaruś. This event is called Dziady (grandparents). Dziady is a traditional day of remembrance of ancestors. Dziady is more than a conventional holiday. It has also become a symbol of resistance to the Soviet regime and the revival of the Biełarusian nation. The masses of demonstrators went through the center of the capital Minsk. They ended the march in Kurapaty (the place on the outskirts of Minsk where the Communist secret police executed over 200,000 people in the 1930s. Mikhail Gorbachev, who negatively commented on this event at the meeting of Soviet Writers, called on Biełarusian classic writer Vasil Bykaŭ and demanded answers: "Why such a loyal republic as Biełaruś, known for its partisan movement during WWII allowed such an anti-government demonstration?" Bykaŭ responded with his question: "Is it disloyal to commemorate the innocent death of our people?" Every writer from each republic supported Bykaŭ. They screamed at Gorbachev and told him that Moscow had no idea how badly people lived in the republics and how suppressed are they by local communist governments. Angered, Gorbachev left the room.

In the same year, Bialiatski became the director of the Literary Museum in Minsk, named after Maksim Bahdanovič.

In 1996 Ales Bialiatski established the Human Rights Center "Viasna" to help victims of human rights violations and document the country's slide into authoritarianism after the brutal suppression of protests against the results of the referendum. Since then, Viasna has become the leading non-governmental organization in the country that deals with human rights and develops civil society in Biełaruś by documenting human rights violations and monitoring elections. During pro-democracy protests following the rigged 2020 presidential election, "Viasna" played a leading role in advocating for the right to freedom of assembly, defending the rights of those arrested during protests, and documenting human rights violations.

### **Mission of Human Rights Center Viasna**

The Human Rights Centre Viasna (HRC Viasna) is a human rights organization based in Belarus, which was founded in 1996 by activist Ales Bialatski. The organization promotes human rights and provides practical assistance to civic initiatives for the legal defense of citizens; the organization conducts research into the state of civil society and provides legal defense in Belarus. HRC Viasna plays a prominent role in protecting human rights in Belarus, especially after the 2020 Presidential (stolen) election. HRC (Viasna) provides legal assistance to political prisoners and their families and documents human rights violations in Biełaruś. Indeed, the main goal of "Viasna" is to contribute to the development of the civic society in Biełaruś, based on respect for human rights, described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Constitution of the Republic of Biełaruś. One of Viasna's key advocacy campaigns focuses on the Abolition of the Death Penalty in Biełaruś. Another critical campaign is Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections. "Viasna" carries out informational, educational, analytical, and international work and works directly through the "Public reception" with people affected by the authorities' actions. "Viasna" prepares and publishes books, brochures, and booklets on various topics related to human rights. "Viasna" publishes reviews-chronicles of the state of human rights every month and according to the year's results. "Viasna's" Human Rights defenders actively participate in missions and lobbying as part of international organizations and prepare alternative reports to the U.N. Human Rights Committees and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

*Submitted by Iryna Toŭścik*