



**ZJEDNOCZENIE POLSKIE W WIELKIEJ BRYTANII.
FEDERATION OF POLES IN GREAT BRITAIN C.I.O.**

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The Rt Hon Dominic Raab, MP,
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs,
House of Commons,
London SW1A 0AA

2 June 2021

Dear Mr Raab,

The Federation of Poles in Great Britain CIO, which is the voice of the organized Polish community in Great Britain since 1947, wishes to bring to your attention the plight of Polish community leaders from our sister organization, the Union of Poles in Belarus – (Związek Polaków na Białorusi -ZPB), who have been imprisoned in the last two months and charged with inciting national hatred as a result of celebrating Polish culture in that country.

Since the emergence of an independent Belarus in 1991, the indigenous Polish ethnic minority, which had inhabited the western provinces of Belarus for many centuries, had been allowed to flourish; there were Polish day schools and cultural centres in areas where the Polish population was most concentrated. However, since 2005 the Lukashenka regime, in its aim to curtail all independent institutions in Belarus, has sought to harass the ZPB, the main Polish cultural organization in Belarus. It created a puppet ZPB, to whom it transferred the ZPB's original registration details and much of its property.

The current deregistered ZPB is still recognized by many Polish community organizations in Belarus as being their true umbrella organization. Under the active leadership of its current elected chair, Andzelika Borys, it has continued running cultural and educational events for the Polish community, particularly for its children. However, following the popular reaction to the falsified elections of 9th August last year, the Belarusian regime initiated a more confrontational policy towards Polish community leaders. On March 23rd, in response to the organization of a festival commemorating the feast-day of a Polish saint, Andzelika Borys was arrested and sentenced next day to 15 days' detention for organizing an illegal gathering.

Despite international protests Ms Borys was not immediately released after her sentence and along with other Polish community leaders, including Irena Biernacka, Maria Tyszkowska, and the journalist Andrzej Poczobut, she has been accused under Section 3, article 130, of the Belarusian Criminal Code of "organizing an illegal mass event", which carries a possible prison sentence of between 5 and 12 years. The prosecutor claimed that they had been inciting nationalist hatred and seeking to "rehabilitate Nazism" on the grounds that they had celebrated wartime Polish partisans who fought the Nazis. It was reported by Belsat, the Warsaw based Belarusian TV news channel, that Borys and Poczobut had both been given an offer to have the charges dropped, provided they allowed themselves to be deported to Poland, but they refused.

In your current justifiable condemnation of the Belarusian regime, especially following the hijacking of a civilian airliner, and your call for the immediate release of the kidnapped Roman Protasevich and other political prisoners held in Belarus, we ask you not to overlook the plight of the community leaders of the Polish minority in Belarus. We would be grateful if you could also raise their plight during the G7 summit in Cornwall next week. We thank you and the government for your contribution to defending democracy and human rights worldwide, and particularly in Eastern Europe, and look forward to the eventual release of all prisoners and full recognition of the rights of ethnic minorities in Belarus.

Yours sincerely

Włodzimierz Mier-Jedrzejowicz, President, Federation of Poles in Great Britain