

Minister of Interior
Mariusz Kamiński
Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji
ul. Stefana Batorego 5
02-591, Warszawa
Polska

Dear Minister of Interior,

I am writing to express my concern over the detention of two activists and the charges brought on 10 June against them in relation to a posters campaign in Warsaw accusing the government of manipulating COVID-19 statistics.

The two activists were detained in the context of an open investigation into the replacement of bus advertisements with posters on 29 and 30 May 2020. The posters alleged that the government manipulated COVID-19 statistics, depicting the Minister of Healthcare dressed as a Knight of Malta holding a sign that read 'Gospel of Łukasz Sz.' and listed other allegations against him.

One of the activists, a well-known and outspoken human rights defender, was detained on the night of 8 June after a house search. She was held for 41 hours and was refused access to her lawyer until her release on 10 June. Her laptop, phones and a tablet were confiscated. The second activist was detained on 9 June and released 20 hours later, on 10 June. They were charged with the offence of 'theft and burglary' on the basis of article 279.1 of the Criminal Code, punishable with one to 10 years prison sentence.

The right to freedom of expression, as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, to which Poland is a party, protects the creation and distribution of posters such as this, even if they are critical of the authorities. While the authorities are claiming there was a damage to property because the posters covered advertisements which amount to a loss of 100 Euros (450 Złoty), the charges that the police are pursuing do not reflect this conduct. It is unclear why these charges were brought as the activists did not take anything with them that could amount to theft or burglary. Amnesty International is concerned that these charges are baseless and appear to be intended to punish the activists for their criticism of the authorities in a way that is consistent with a pattern of harassment of protesters and activists documented by the organization since 2017 in Poland.

I therefore urge you to ensure that the investigation against the two activists for 'theft and burglary' is closed and the charges are dropped immediately.

Yours sincerely,

