

Shortlist of nominees

Index on Censorship Annual

Freedom of Expression

Awards 2010

Meeting Judges Panel

Judges Panel 2010

Shaheed Fatima, human rights lawyer; Emily Bell, editor of Guardian.co.uk;
Caroline Michel, chief executive PFD; Lemn Sissay, poet and writer; Lindsey
Hilsum, international editor for Channel 4 News.

Shortlist - Bindmans Law and Campaigning Award - 2010

1.4 Charter 97 (Belarus)

"The authorities are afraid of the internet, because today the internet is the only source of truthful information about what is happening in the country."

- Natallia Radzina, Charter 97

Charter 97 is a campaign movement established in Belarus, based on the Charter 77 group set up in Communist Czechoslovakia. As with the Czechoslovak group, Charter 97 dedicates itself to the principles of "independence, freedom and democracy and respect for human rights". Charter 97 created a model of collective security in Belarus whereby the victims of political repression were provided with legal, monetary and information assistance.

The website www.charter97.org is the main independent source of information on Belarus for Belarusians living and working inside the country. The site comes under constant denial-of-service attacks by hackers thought to be working for the country's secret service, who want to stop its activities. The office moves from one place to another because its work is attacked and severely disrupted on a regular basis by members of these "special forces". In the current climate, Belarusians are isolated and have little access to information and news about what is happening in their country. Because the independent media is stifled and restricted, the website has become a leading and vital source of information about human rights and free expression activities in the country. Visitors to the site have access to the latest news about arrests, physical harassment and other violations of human rights. The site also provides information about the work of those politically opposed to the current government. Foreign embassies in Belarus, members of the international media and the American State Department also cite the Charter 97 website as being one of the main sources of independent information on Belarus.

Natallia Radzina, the Head of Press for Charter 97, has campaigned tirelessly for over 11 years, reporting abuses of human rights at the hands of the Belarusian state. Along with her team, she works to bring to light the cases of arrest, detention and harassment of critical journalists and human rights activists. Natallia is arrested on regular basis. However, she continues her work updating news around the clock so that people in Belarus know the latest news as it happens.

"Natallia Radzina is a journalist who has been working bravely in underground conditions for the past ten years. Only because of such courageous and talented people like Natallia Radzina and the whole team of Charter 97, devoted to truth and morality in journalism, do we Belarusians and the whole world know what is happening in the last dictatorship in Europe."

- Natalia Koliada, Belarus Free Theatre