



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN:

PROTECTION AND ASYLUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER OLGA KARATCH

#protection4olga

August 23rd 2023

Following the denial of political asylum by the Lithuanian authorities for the Belarusian peacebuilder and human rights defender Olga Karatch (Volha Karach), the international campaign *#protection4olga* has just been launched to demand protection and asylum for the director of the organisation [‘Our House’](#). She has been fighting for human rights in Belarus for years, including the right to conscientious objection to military service, and is therefore persecuted and faces capital punishment in her country of origin, where she has been labelled a ‘terrorist’ by the regime.

On 18 August 2023, Lithuania denied her political asylum, calling Olga Karatch a ‘person who represents a threat to the national security of the Republic of Lithuania’. She was however granted a one-year temporary residence in the country, probably due to international letters of concerns that some politicians and heads of foundations had written to the authorities and to Lithuanian Ambassadors in different countries. But this status does not give her any safety regarding her status – authorities could at any time renege this decision and decide to deport her.

For that reason, we have started an International Campaign for the immediate protection of the human rights defender and peacebuilder Olga Karatch.

The [UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#) adopted in 1998 acknowledges ‘the valuable work of individuals, groups and associations in contributing to the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of peoples and individuals’.

Olga Karatch, through the organisation she leads, ‘Our House’, has numerous activities to her credit in monitoring and defending human rights in Belarus and Belarusian citizens who have fled to other countries – such as Lithuania – and for this reason her organization was also chosen by the [International Peace Bureau to be nominated for the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize](#), together with the [Russian Movement of Conscientious Objectors](#) and the [Ukrainian Pacifist Movement](#).

States have an obligation to protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens, and, especially for human rights defenders who ‘frequently face threats and harassment and suffer insecurity’ ‘to take all measures necessary to ensure the protection of human rights defenders, at both the local and the national levels, including in times of armed conflict and peacebuilding’, as stated in [UN General Assembly resolution 66/164](#).

We express our deep concern that ‘in some instances, national security and counter-terrorism legislation and other measures, such as laws regulating civil society organizations, have been misused to target human rights defenders or have hindered their work and endangered their safety in a manner contrary to international law’, as stated in [UN Human Rights Council Resolution 22/6 of 2013](#) on the protection of human rights defenders, which commits all states to protect and not criminalise those who work to defend human rights.

- Therefore, we appeal to the highest Lithuanian authorities, the President of the Republic of Lithuania, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to respect international standards and provide protection and asylum for the Belarussian human rights defender Olga Karatch, who has taken refuge in Lithuania.
- Lithuania is also a member of the European Union. We therefore also appeal to the European institutions and the EU Missions (Embassies and Consulates of EU Member States and European Commission Delegations) which, as stated in the [EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders](#), should support and protect human rights defenders.
- We also call on our national governments to take action to ensure that the protection of human rights defenders is guaranteed always and everywhere.
- We call upon all civil society, from individual citizens to journalists and institutional representatives across Europe to take action in defence of human rights and those who defend them.

A sample letter to be sent to Lithuanian authorities can be found below. You are more than welcome to use it and properly advocate and support human rights defenders Olga Karatch.

For more information contact: ask@news.house

Draft letter:

To: *President Gitanas Nausėda, e-mail: kanceliarija@president.lt or online form at <https://www.lrp.lt/en/institution/letter-to-the-president/21930>*

Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė LRV, e-mail: kanceliarija@lr.lt

Speaker of Lithuanian Parliament Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, e-mail: viktorija.cmilyte@lrs.lt

Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis, e-mail: minister@urm.lt

Cc: *Our House, e-mail: info@nash-dom.info*

Dear President, dear Prime Minister, dear Speaker of Lithuanian Parliament, dear Minister of Foreign Affairs,

I am writing to you because I am concerned about the safety and security of Ms Olga Karatch (Volha Karatch), a peacebuilder and human rights defender from Belarus who has sought refuge in your country. Recently, on the 18th of August, the Lithuanian Immigration Authorities rejected her application for political asylum.

Ms Olga Karatch is part of the Belarussian opposition and had to leave her home country in 2020 before the protests against the rigged presidential elections. Her organization “VšĮ Tarptautinis pilietinių iniciatyvų centras „Mūsų namai” is registered in Lithuania since 2014.

Olga Karatch and her organization are fighting for human and civil rights in Belarus and against a possible direct participation of Belarus in the war in Ukraine. For that, they repeatedly have been threatened by the Lukashenko regime. The Belarussian KGB labelled her as a terrorist, and recently there have been death threats against her. If she returned to Belarus, she would face immediate arrest and conviction to many years of prison; even imposition of the death penalty cannot be ruled out.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted in 1998 acknowledges ‘the valuable work of individuals, groups and associations in contributing to the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of peoples and individuals’.

States have an obligation to protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens, and, especially for human rights defenders who ‘frequently face threats and harassment and suffer insecurity’ ‘to take all measures necessary to ensure the protection of human rights defenders, at both the local and the national levels, including in times of armed conflict and peacebuilding’, as stated in UN General Assembly resolution 66/164.

We express our deep concern that ‘in some instances, national security and counter-terrorism legislation and other measures, such as laws regulating civil society organizations, have been misused to target human rights defenders or have hindered their work and endangered their safety in a manner contrary to international law’, as stated in UN Human Rights Council Resolution 22/6 of 2013 on the protection of human rights defenders, which commits all states to protect and not criminalise those who work to defend human rights.

Therefore, the situation is life threatening for her, and we ask you to extend your support to Ms Karatch and to allow her to stay in Lithuania and continue her work for human rights and peace under the secure status of being granted political asylum.

Yours sincerely,

Date

(Signature)

Please donate to ‘Our House’:

Bank Name: Siauliu Bankas AB

IBAN: LT567180300008700065

SWIFT (BIC): CBSBLT26

Account Holder: Vsj Tarptautinis pilietiniu iniciatyvu centras “Musu namai”

Bank address: Tilzes g.149 76348 Siauliu Lithuania

Banko kode: 112025254

Country code: LT

Name of the organization: VšĮ Tarptautinis pilietinių iniciatyvų centras „Mūsų namai“

Address of the organisation: Vilniaus r. sav., Zujūnų sen., Buivydiškių k., Pamedės g. 6

Registration code: 303223926

Contact details: tel. +370 (5) 215 7190, finance@nash-dom.info

#ObjectWarCampaign: Russia, Belarus, Ukraine: Protection and asylum for deserters and conscientious objectors to military service.

