

Lukashenko Rival Jailed

May 15, 2011

The  Moscow Times

MINSK — One of President Alexander Lukashenko's main political opponents was sentenced Saturday to five years in a high-security jail after being convicted of helping to organize a rally against the leader's re-election.

Andrei Sannikov, who had denied the charges, is the first to be sentenced of five presidential candidates who are standing trial in Minsk for their part in a mass protest on Dec. 19.

Sannikov's wife, journalist Irina Khalip, is also on trial, and her sentence is due to be passed Monday; the prosecutor has asked for a two-year suspended sentence. The family has expressed fear the couple's 4-year-old son could be taken into state care if they are both jailed.

State Department spokesman Mark Toner said the United States considered the five presidential candidates "political prisoners" and called for their immediate release.