

UA 62/19

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## POLAND

### STOP HARASSMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST

On 6 May at around 6am, police officers raided the home of prominent human rights defender Elżbieta Podleśna. They arrested her and kept her in detention for several hours. The police claimed to have found in her home copies of posters depicting the Virgin Mary with a halo around head and shoulders in the colours of the LGBTI flag. The police also confiscated her electronic equipment, including her laptop, phone and memory cards.

Elżbieta Podleśna is being investigated for “offending religious beliefs”, a criminal offence that carries up to two years’ imprisonment. She is being targeted for her human rights activism and this absurd investigation must be stopped. Having, creating or distributing posters of this nature should not be a criminal offence, and is protected under the right to freedom of expression.

Elżbieta Podleśna is already facing numerous legal proceedings stemming solely from her peaceful activism. The way she is targeted with absurd charges in this case is consistent with this pattern of harassment.



*Elżbieta Podleśna*  
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#### **Please send a message to the Minister of Interior.**

- \* Express your concern that human rights defender Elżbieta Podleśna is being investigated after police raided her home on 6 May and allegedly found copies of posters depicting the Virgin Mary with a halo around head and shoulders in the colours of the LGBTI flag.
- \* Urge him to make sure that the investigation against Elżbieta Podleśna for “offending religious beliefs” is halted immediately.
- \* Insist that the police return all Elżbieta Podleśna’s belongings.
- \* Call on him to ensure that she can carry out her peaceful actions free from harassment and reprisals.

#### **Write to**

Elżbieta Witek

Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji

ul. Stefana Batorego 5

02-591, Warszawa, Polska

E-mail: [kancelaria.glowna@mswia.gov.pl](mailto:kancelaria.glowna@mswia.gov.pl) or [biuroministra.BM@mswia.gov.pl](mailto:biuroministra.BM@mswia.gov.pl)

Twitter: [@elzbietawitek](https://twitter.com/elzbietawitek)

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Fax: 011 48 22 601 3988

Salutation: Dear Minister of Interior

**Please copy**

His Excellency Andrzej Kurnicki  
Ambassador for the Republic of Poland  
443 Daly Avenue  
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6H3  
Fax: 613 789 1218  
Email: [ottawa.info@msz.gov.pl](mailto:ottawa.info@msz.gov.pl)

**Additional information**

Human rights defender Elżbieta Podleśna had just returned from a trip to Belgium and the Netherlands with Amnesty International when her home was raided by the police at 6am on 6 May. It remains unclear why it was necessary to investigate Elżbieta Podleśna and why the prosecutor's office authorized the raid instead of just summoning her to the police station to testify.

Elżbieta Podleśna is suspected of "offending religious beliefs", after the police claimed that they found copies of a posters depicting the Virgin Mary with a halo around head and shoulders in the colours of the LGBTI flag when they raided her home. The image had been posted around the town of Płock, in central Poland, at the end of April. Possession, creation or distribution of posters such as these is protected under the right to freedom of expression. Poland is bound by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as well as the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the EU to respect, protect and promote the right to freedom of expression.

This case should be seen in the broader context of harassment of activists and human rights defenders in Poland. Elżbieta Podleśna is facing at least 14 different proceedings in relation to her peaceful activism and she is under constant police surveillance. As documented in the recent report *The power of "the street": Protecting the right to peaceful protest in Poland*, this form of harassment is common against outspoken activists and human rights defenders.