

BELARUS: OPEN LETTER ON TORTURE OR OTHER ILL-TREATMENT OF PRISONERS BY THE STATE REPRESSIVE FORCES

26th June 2021

Mr. minister Ivan V. Kubrakov and Mr. minister Vladimir V. Makei,

On the occasion of the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, we would like to express our concern about grave human rights violations allegedly committed by police, prison officers and interrogators on prisoners in custody. We are shocked by the numerous allegations of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in Belarusian custody that have obviously violated the United Nations Convention against Torture which Belarus has undertaken to respect in 1985.

The following cases demonstrate how your ministry, Mr. Kubrakov, is involved in and responsible for violating the basic principles of the Convention. Blogger Mikola Dziadok, detained in November 2020, was reportedly tortured with tear gas during the arrest and repeatedly beaten. The violence perpetrated by the state security forces against Mikola was so serious that Amnesty International addressed the Belarusian authorities with the demand to take urgent measures to investigate the information about torturing Mikola.

Also the case of unprecedented state kidnaping of journalist Raman Pratasevich on 23 May 2021 and his manipulated “confession” indicate torture and visible marks of other ill-treatment in detention.

A teenager 16-year-old Timur M., detained on August 12 2020, was tortured at police station and his head was beaten against concrete, police beat him with a baton on the eyes and was placed on his knees, his head was pulled back by his hair and a baton was inserted into his mouth which has caused severe injuries. Timur M.’s case illustrates violation of the right of “access to justice” due to the government’s unwillingness to open a case and conduct an investigation, as well as the prohibition of a lawyer’s access to their client. Another case of torturing a minor to get confession is Aleh Rubets, who was reportedly injured as a result of beatings by law enforcement agents during their pre-trial detention or arrest.

These cases are just the tip of the iceberg illustrating the scope in which the regime of Alexander Lukashenko committed crimes against humanity.

We call on you Mr. Kubrakov, to immediately and effectively investigate all alleged acts of torture or ill treatment and prosecute the perpetrators. At the same time, we demand both of you, Mr. Kubrakov and Mr. Makei, to ensure that the police, the interrogators and all officers who are in touch with prisoners will fully respect the principles of the Convention against Torture, which Belarus has committed to apply. We demand that criminal proceedings be immediately instituted concerning these incidents, on the grounds stipulated in Articles 128, 426, and 455 of the Criminal Code; that an investigation be carried out; and that the offenders be held accountable.

We hope that this appeal will receive your attention which will lead to the elimination of violent and torturing methods used by state security forces.

P.S. You may take into account that in the last decades we have witnessed dozens of cases in which political authorities responsible for massive violations of the human rights of the civilian population have been brought to justice to a greater or lesser extent. For many of them, these were life sentences.

Signed by:

NESEHNUTÍ, Czech Republic

Libereco – Partnership for Human Rights, Germany-Switzerland

Million Moments for Democracy, Czech Republic

Kolegium Europy Wschodniej (The Jan Nowak-Jezioranski College of Eastern Europe), Poland

AMO – Association for International Affairs, Czech Republic

Human Rights Center ZMINA, Ukraine

Human rights organization Mashr, Ingushetia- Russia

Institut ľudských prav - Human Rights Institute, Slovakia

Östgruppen - Swedish Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, Sweden

ACAT Belgium, Belgium

ACAT Switzerland, Switzerland

European Values, Czech Republic

ACAT Germany, Germany

People's embassy of Belarus in Germany, Germany

Human Rights House Yerevan, Armenia