

URGENT ACTION

RELEASE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER MARFA RABKOVA

Woman human rights defender Marfa Rabkova was detained as a criminal suspect under false pretext on the evening of 17 September, by officers of the Interior Ministry's Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption (GUBAZIK). Her husband Vadzim Zharomski was also detained but released shortly after. Marfa Rabkova may face criminal charges. She is a prisoner of conscience, targeted solely for her peaceful human rights work and must be immediately and unconditionally released.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*Maj.-Gen. Ivan Naskevich
Chair of the Investigative Committee
Ul. Frunze, d.19
Minsk 220034
Republic of Belarus
Email: sk@sk.gov.by*

Dear Chair of the Investigative Committee,

*I am deeply worried about the detention of **Marfa Rabkova**, a woman human rights defender and coordinator of the Volunteer Service of the Human Rights Center "Viasna".*

Marfa Rabkova and her husband, Vadzim Zharomski, were detained on the evening of 17 September by officers of the Interior Ministry's Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption (GUBAZIK). Their apartment was searched and money, personal belongings and IT equipment were seized. Vadzim Zharomski was later released but Marfa Rabkova was remanded for ten days as a suspect under Art. 293(3) of the Criminal Code ("training or other preparation of persons to participate in riots, or funding of such activities") which carries a prison sentence of up to three years.

Marfa Rabkova is a prisoner of conscience who is being targeted solely for her legitimate activities as a human rights defender, such as observing demonstrations and documenting evidence of human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment currently faced by peaceful protesters who have been detained by law enforcement officials. Marfa Rabkova has committed no crime and there are no grounds for her prosecution. Her arrest, detention and prosecution are retaliation for her human rights work, and constitute a major breach of Belarus' obligations under international human rights law.

The Belarusian authorities must stop persecuting members of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" and other civil society activists, and respect the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression of all.

In light of the above, I urge you to:

- ***Immediately terminate criminal proceedings against Marfa Rabkova and ensure that no criminal charges are brought against her;***
- ***Take all necessary steps to ensure that Marfa Rabkova and all other prisoners of conscience in Belarus are released immediately and unconditionally.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Marfa Rabkova is a member of the Human Rights Center "Viasna" where she coordinates the organization's Volunteer Service. According to Viasna, throughout the presidential election campaign, during and after the 9 August election, members of Viasna faced harassment from the authorities, including arbitrary detentions, so-called administrative arrest and attempted criminal prosecution in connection with their human rights activities.

The detention of woman human rights defender Marfa Rabkova comes in the context of a drastic deterioration in the human rights situation in Belarus. During the electoral campaign period and following the presidential election on 9 August, there have been mass peaceful protests including against the widely disputed official results. Throughout, the authorities have engaged in an escalating campaign against the opposition and all dissenting voices. Thousands of people have been arbitrarily arrested by police, an overwhelming majority of them peaceful protesters or bystanders, and many apprehended in abduction-style arrest by masked plain-clothed men.

According to countless first-hand testimonies, widely available photographic and video material, and medical documents, many if not all of those detained have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. The detention centre on Akrestsina, in the capital Minsk, where Marfa Rabkova too was initially held, has become synonymous with the practice of vicious beatings and other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Dozens of high-profile political and civil society activists and their associates have been arrested under trumped-up charges and subsequently remanded as criminal suspects – a fate Marfa Rabkova must be spared from. They should all be immediately released, and all other human rights violations must stop immediately, including the dispersal of peaceful assemblies, mass arrests and the widespread ill-treatment and torture of detainees.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian, Russian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 19 November 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Marfa Rabkova (she/her)