

PUBLIC

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Prisoners of conscience / Fear of torture or ill-treatment / Police brutality / Arbitrary arrests / Fear for safety / Health concern

9 April 1998

BELARUS

Vyacheslav SIVCHYK, aged 36
Pavel SEVERINETS, aged 21
Dmitriy VASKOVICH, aged 15
Alyaksandr KASHENYA
Ivan ABADOVSKY
Leonid VASYUCHENKO, aged 28
Stepan KULCHENKO, aged 17 (released)
Timophey DRANCHUK, aged 16 (released)

The above-named prisoners of conscience, arrested at a large anti-government demonstration in Minsk on 2 April 1998, could be at serious risk of torture and ill-treatment.

The protest demonstration took place on the first anniversary of the union treaty between Russia and Belarus. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who has declared it a national holiday, is attempting to forge closer ties with Russia against a background of popular discontent.

Vyacheslav Sivchyk, secretary of the Belorussian Popular Front (BNF), was allegedly severely beaten by police during his arrest and subsequently hospitalized suffering from concussion. He stood trial on 3 April and was sentenced to 10-days imprisonment under the Administrative Code of Belarus.

Pavel Severinets, an opposition activist and leader of the BNF's Youth Front, faces up to five years imprisonment on charges of "instigating mass disorder", "organization or participation in group actions violating the public order" (under Article 186 of the Criminal Code) and "hooliganism" (under article 201 of the Criminal Code) for allegedly having organized the unauthorized protest march.

Dmitriy Vaskovich, Alyaksandr Kashenya, Ivan Abadovsky, Leonid Vasyuchenko, Stepan Kulchenko and Timophey Dranchuk have also been charged with similar offences. Alyaksandr Kashenya and Ivan Abadovsky reportedly received 10 and 15 days' imprisonment respectively. Leonid Vasyuchenko and Dmitriy Vaskovich are reportedly in detention charged under the above articles. Stepan Kulchenko and Timophey Dranchuk were reportedly released, though the criminal charges against them remain.

In addition, information has been received concerning the ill-treatment in police custody of Dmitriy Vaskovich, allegedly to force him to confess against Pavel Severinets and the other detainees.

Reports indicate that law enforcement officials severely beat demonstrators at the march. In addition more than 50 people, about one third of them reportedly minors, were detained for several hours and in some cases overnight.

Some of these stood trial on 3 April on charges relating to their participation in an unauthorized demonstration and received administrative penalties. They were released after the court ruled either to fine them or to issue them with a warning.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Political unrest, in the form of protests and demonstrations, is on the increase in Belarus. Police have responded with the systematic and widespread use of force against peaceful opposition demonstrators. Between 20 and 50 people were arrested and beaten by police following a peaceful demonstration in the Belorussian capital Minsk on 22 March 1998 (see UA 92/98, EUR 49/03/98, 23 March 1998). The demonstration was held to mark the 80th anniversary of the declaration of an independent state of Belorussia (as it was formerly known).

Those detained included journalists and members of the opposition BNF. Women and minors, including a 15 year old boy, Pavel Rakhmanov, were also arrested.

The organization is not aware of any steps taken by the government or the President of Belarus to stop the pattern of ill-treatment and imprisonment, by law enforcement officials, of members of the opposition during peaceful strikes and demonstrations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Russian or your own language:

- expressing serious concern for the health of Vyacheslav Sivchyk and Dmitriy Vaskovich;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the six prisoners of conscience, detained solely for their political beliefs and non-violent opposition activities and for the charges against all, including Stepan Kulchenko and Timopheyy Dranchuk to be dropped;
- seeking assurances that Vyacheslav Sivchyk and Dmitriy Vaskovich are granted access to all necessary medical care;
- seeking assurances that no-one in the future will be subjected to ill-treatment or imprisonment solely on the grounds of their political beliefs and for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of assembly;
- urging the authorities to initiate prompt and impartial investigations into all allegations of ill-treatment of demonstrators by the police, particularly of Vyacheslav Sivchyk and Dmitriy Vaskovich, and to bring those found responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to provide compensation to the victims of police abuse and to inform all law enforcement officials that torture and ill-treatment are prohibited in any circumstances under the provisions of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Belarus is a party as a successor state of the USSR.

APPEALS TO:

The President of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka
 Respublika Belarus
 220016 g. Minsk, ul. Karla Marksa, 38
 Administratsia Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus
 Prezidentu Respubliki Belarus Lukashenka A.H, BELARUS

Telegrams: Prezidentu Lukashenka, Minsk, Belarus

Faxes: + 375 172 22 38 72

Salutation: Dear President

The Procurator General of Belarus, Aleh Bozhelko
 Respublika Belarus
 220050 g. Minsk, Ul. Internatsionalnaya, 22
 Prokuratura Respubliki Belarus
 Generalnomu prokuroru BOZHELKU A., BELARUS

Telegrams: Generalnomu prokuroru, Minsk, Belarus

Faxes: + 375 172 26 41 66
Salutation: Dear Procurator General

Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, Agolets, Valyantsin
Respublika Belarus
g. Minsk, Ul. Urytskaha, 5
Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del Respubliki Belarus
Ministru Agoletsu, BELARUS

Telegrams: Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del, Minsk, Belarus

Faxes: + 375 172 26 12 47

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Ivan Antonovich
Respublika Belarus
220030 g.Minsk, Ul. Lenina, 19
Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Respubliki Belarus
Ministru Antonovich I., BELARUS

Faxes: + 375 172 27 45 21

and to diplomatic representatives of BELARUS accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 May 1998.