

URGENT ACTION

BELARUSIAN PRISONER FACES PUNISHMENT CELL

Mykalau Statkevich, a prisoner of conscience, faces 10 days in punishment cell for refusing to sign a confession. The prison authorities have stated that he has suicidal tendencies. His relatives fear his life may be at risk.

In January the head of the Mahiliou prison made a statement that **Mykalau Statkevich** has suicidal tendencies. However no evidence exists to support this claim, and his family fear that the prison authorities may be preparing to use this as an excuse if something happens to Mikalau Statkevich in prison. On 27 June, during a prison committee hearing the head of the prison confirmed his conclusion. On 4 July, when Mykalau Statkevich's wife talked to him on the phone, he was in good spirits. After the hearing, Mykalau Statkevich submitted a letter to the head of the prison asking him on what basis he reached his conclusion and whether he intended to use this conclusion if "something were to happen to him" in prison. At the hearing Mykalau Statkevich was given 10 days in a punishment cell, allegedly for refusing to request a Presidential pardon when asked to do so on 18 June. Earlier, the prison authorities claimed that Mykalau Statkevich had regularly violated prison regulations, was inclined towards violence and liable to attempt escape. The violations that Mykalau Statkevich has been accused of committing can be used to add up to one year to his sentence under article 411 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus ("deliberate disobedience to the correctional institution administration").

Opposition presidential candidate Mykalau Statkevich was sentenced to six years in prison on 26 May 2011 according to article 293 part 1 of the Criminal Code ("organization of mass disorder") for taking part in post-election demonstrations in December 2010. Amnesty International believes that the charges against him were unfounded, and that he has been targeted for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of assembly and expression. In January 2012 Mykalau Statkevich was transferred from Penal Colony No. 17 in Shklou to Prison No. 4 in Mahiliou for allegedly violating the prison regime. The continuing harassment of Mykalau Statkevich for allegedly violating prison rules appears to be intended to put physical and psychological pressure on him to sign a confession. Amnesty International reiterates that prisoners of conscience should never be pressured into signing confessions or seeking pardons.

Please write immediately in Belarusian, Russian or your own language:

- Remind the Belarusian authorities that Mykalau Statkevich is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for the peaceful expression of his political views and that he should be released immediately and unconditionally, along with all other prisoners of conscience held in connection with demonstrations in December 2010;
- Remind them that they have a duty to protect the physical and psychological wellbeing of those in custody;
- Call on the authorities to ensure that Mykalau Statkevich is not pressured into signing a confession.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 AUGUST 2012 TO:

General Prosecutor

Alexander Koniuk
Ul. Internatsionalnaya 22
220030 Minsk,
Belarus
Fax: +375 17 226 42 52

Salutation: Dear General Prosecutor

Minister of Internal Affairs

Igor Shunevich
Ul. Gorodskoi Val 4
220030 Minsk,
Belarus
Fax: +375 17 203 99 18

Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Chief of the Department of Penitentiary
Institutions at the MIA
Sergei Doroshko
Ul. Vokzalnaya 42
220007 Minsk, Belarus
Fax: +375 17 226 18 06 (say "fax")
Salutation: Dear Sergei Doroshko

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mykalau Statkevich is one of four prisoners of conscience who are currently imprisoned in Belarus in connection with a largely peaceful demonstration that took place on 19 December 2010. Tens of thousands of Belarusians gathered in central Minsk to protest against unfair elections. The demonstration was mostly peaceful, but when a violent incident broke out at the doors of Government House, riot police moved in to disperse the crowds.

Over 700 people were detained, the overwhelming majority of whom had been peaceful participants and bystanders. Most of the detained were charged with administrative offences and sentenced to 10 – 15 days' imprisonment. However, a considerable number, including six of the seven opposition presidential candidates, other opposition activists and leading independent journalists, were charged with criminal offences including with 'organizing mass disorder'. Since the demonstration, the authorities have conducted country-wide searches of opposition and media offices, and human rights defenders, lawyers and other civil society activists have witnessed an unprecedented clampdown on their activities. Many have been detained in the months following the demonstration.

Many who were sentenced for participating in the demonstrations in December 2010 have been released after they agreed to sign a confession for organizing or taking part in "mass disorder".

Those four prisoners of conscience currently imprisoned in Belarus are:

Mykalau Statkevich was sentenced to six years on 26 May 2011

Pavel Sevyarynets sentenced to three years on 16 May 2011

Zmitser Dashkevich was sentenced to two years on 24 March 2011

Eduard Lobau was sentenced to four years on 24 March 2011

Name: Mykalau Statkevich

Gender m/f: M

Further information on UA: 196/12 Index: EUR 49/010/2012 Issue Date: 9 July 2012