

# URGENT ACTION

## OUTSPOKEN PSYCHIATRIST FORCIBLY DETAINED

**A psychiatrist working in Belarus, Igor Postnov, has been forcibly detained and treated in the hospital where he works following his outspoken criticism of the health care system in Vitebsk, a city in the north of the country.**

**Igor Postnov**, a psychiatrist working at the Vitebsk Regional Centre for Psychiatry and Narcology, has released a number of interviews over the past 18 months on YouTube criticizing government policy and the management of health care in the city. In his interviews he has raised issues such as medical errors, misuse of funds; in June 2013, he criticized the police's use of in-patient psychiatric testing to deal with homeless people and vagrants.

Igor Postnov has had conflicts with his managers for his outspoken criticism, and on 16 August a Psychiatric Commission at the hospital where he works concluded that he required forced psychiatric treatment for a "psychopathic personality disorder with a mania for persecuting the authorities". That day, Igor Postnov phoned a journalist from Radio Free Europe to say he was detained, after which his phone was disconnected. On 21 August the Vitebsk Regional Court ruled in a closed sitting that Igor Postnov should be forcibly treated in the Vitebsk Regional Centre for Psychiatry and Narcology. The court order stated that he required psychiatric treatment against his will because of a "persistent delusional disorder" which presented a danger to himself and others. The court order does not explain how Igor Postnov represents a danger to society and mentions only his publications on the internet. Igor Postnov has 10 days to appeal, but he has no contact with the outside world and was only able to see a lawyer on 22 August after local human rights activists intervened.

States have a particular responsibility to protect freedom of expression and allow robust debate about public figures and institutions. Igor Postnov may have been arbitrarily detained because of his legitimate criticism of the health care system in the Vitebsk region; if so Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience.

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

- Reminding the authorities that involuntary psychiatric treatment should only be used in cases of severe mental illness when it is likely that that person will cause immediate or imminent harm to themselves or others;
- Asking them to ensure that a second psychiatric expert commission examines Igor Postnov to identify the nature of the risk he poses to himself and others;
- Urging them to ensure that Igor Postnov is offered adequate legal advice and access to a lawyer to be able to prepare his appeal.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 9 OCTOBER 2013 TO:**

#### Minister of Health

Vasily Zharko  
ul. Myasnikova 39  
220048 Minsk, Belarus  
Fax: +375 17 222 46 27  
E-mail: mzrb@belcmt.by

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

#### Prosecutor General

Alexander Koniuk  
ul. Internatsionalnaya 22  
220050 Minsk, Belarus  
Fax: +375 17 226 42 52 (Say "fax"  
clearly if voice answers)

Email: info@prokuratura.gov.by

**Salutation: Dear General Prosecutor**

#### **And copies to:**

Head Doctor  
Yelena Martynova  
Vitebsk District Centre for Psychiatry and  
Narcology  
Ul Tsentralnaya 1a,  
Settlement Vitba 211300, Vitebsk Region  
Phone/fax: +375 212 43 23 18(Say "fax"  
clearly if voice answers)  
E-mail: VOPD@vitebsk.by

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.**

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

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to principle 16 of the UN Principles for the protection of persons with mental illness and the improvement of mental health care involuntary psychiatric treatment should only be resorted to in cases of severe mental illness for the shortest possible and where there is an immediate or imminent risk that the person will harm themselves or others.

In Belarus, the right to freedom of expression is frequently violated, and individuals who criticize the authorities often face prosecution. The rights to freedom of assembly and association are also curtailed and any form of critical public action, even a one-person picket, is subject to permission which is rarely granted, and peaceful demonstrators face fines or short prison sentences. Human rights activists, political activists and other civil society activists and groups face constant bureaucratic hurdles, harassment and prosecution on lesser charges. Belarus' disregard for human rights, including violations of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association has led to international condemnation and isolation of the country. Belarus is not a member of the Council of Europe and its special guest status was suspended in 1997 after widely contested elections. Belarus is the only country in Europe and Central Asia that still executes prisoners – it maintains the death penalty for “premeditated, aggravated murder” and 12 other peacetime offences.

For further information see the recent Amnesty International report published in April 2013: What is not permitted is prohibited: Silencing civil society in Belarus, AI Index: EUR 49/002/2013 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR49/002/2013/en>).

Name: Igor Postnov

Gender m/f: m

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