

URGENT ACTION

TORTURED PRISONER STILL DENIED MEDICAL CARE

Viachaslau Rahashchuk is a taxi driver from the Belarusian city of Pinsk who was arbitrarily detained, tortured and later sentenced to six years in prison. He has remained behind bars since 10 August 2020 and remains in need of urgent medical treatment as a result of torture and other ill-treatment in detention.

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

Andrey Shved
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CC: Yauhen Syarheevich Khitryk
Head of the Pre-Trial Detention Centre No. 6
Email: br.sizo6.oiriko@din.gov.by

Dear Prosecutor General,

I am deeply concerned about the imprisonment of taxi driver **Viachaslau Rahashchuk** who is suffering from serious medical conditions that have resulted from torture and other ill-treatment in detention.

On 10 August 2020 Viachaslau Rahashchuk was violently and arbitrarily arrested by at least five police officers while walking with his sister and her 12-year-old son in Pinsk. On 11 August, one of Viachaslau Rahashchuk's former cellmates contacted his mother and told her that Viachaslau Rahashchuk had been very badly beaten by prison officers. He said Viachaslau Rahashchuk had a hematoma behind his ear, three cuts to his head and bruises all over his spine. Viachaslau Rahashchuk has had a continuous ringing noise in his head and after the beatings he would lose consciousness for up to twenty minutes at a time. In May this year Viachaslau was examined by a medic at the detention centre and was assured that he was fine. However, his medical conditions have not improved; the continued requests from his family for him to be examined by an independent doctor have been declined, and he is not receiving the medical treatment he urgently requires.

On 30 April Viachaslau Rahashchuk was sentenced to six years in a strict regime colony under Article 293 Part 2 of the Belarusian Criminal Code (participating in mass riots). His appeal hearing took place on 6 July and his sentence was upheld.

I urge you to:

- **Ensure that Viachaslau Rahashchuk is released immediately as he has committed no crime and like, thousands of others in Belarus since 9 August 2020, has been detained arbitrarily;**
- **Pending his release, immediately transfer Viachaslau Rahashchuk to a hospital with adequate medical facilities to assess and treat his deteriorating health condition.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Viachaslau Rahashchuk is one of the 14 people of the so called 'Pinsk case' who were sentenced to lengthy prison terms for taking part in 'mass riots'. Those people either participated in peaceful post-election protests or happened to pass by the area in which the protests took place. They were violently arrested and tortured, accused of throwing objects at police and destroying property and later sentenced to prison terms and ordered to collectively pay over 65 thousand euro in damages to the city and the 109 police officers that have testified as victims in court. According to credible reports, the 109 police officers have claimed to lose sleep and appetite after peaceful protests on 9 and 10 August 2020. If this sum is not paid collectively by the 'Pinsk case' prisoners, all their property will be confiscated 30 days after the appeal hearing that took place on July 6. One of the 'Pinsk case' prisoners is a mother of five children.

The 'Pinsk case' is representative of the widespread and egregious human rights violations that continue against those in Belarus who express dissent, or are suspected of showing dissent, or those the authorities want to target, following the beginning of mass peaceful protests against the widely contested results of the presidential election on 9 August 2020. Belarus is facing its most serious human rights crisis in its post-independence history.

Opposition activists, journalists and bloggers, those expressing dissent, peaceful protesters and, as in the case of Viachaslau Rahashchuk, by-standers, have been swept up in their thousands by law enforcement officers, many of whom operate in plain clothes, with no identifying insignia and often using excessive force. Current estimates are that over 30,000 people have been detained since 9 August. Thousands have faced proceedings under the Code of Administrative Offences resulting in fines or periods of "administrative detention" up to 15 days which can be imposed consecutively leading to much longer periods of detention. Over 3,000 people have been prosecuted under criminal charges related to mass events and protests, with hundreds already sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. All those who have been targeted solely for exercising their human rights must be immediately and unconditionally released.

Local and international human rights organizations have collected hundreds of testimonies of detainees who have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment at the time of arrest, during transportation and while in pretrial detention. As yet, not a single investigation has been opened by the Belarusian authorities against law enforcement officers.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian or Russian

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 14 September 2021

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Viachaslau Rahashchuk (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/3463/2020/en/>