

AI Index: PRE 01/146/2012  
19 March 2012

## **Belarus must release bodies of convicts executed over Minsk metro bombing**

The execution of two men convicted of carrying out a deadly metro bombing last year in Minsk has been condemned by Amnesty International as it called on the Belarus authorities to release the bodies to their families for burial.

Uladzslau Kavalyou and Dzmitry Kanavalau were sentenced to death on 30 November after being found guilty of a bomb attack that killed 15 people and wounded more than 300 in April last year.

The trial has been widely criticized for failing to meet international fair trial standards. The two men's sentences were passed by the Supreme Court of Belarus, leaving no possibility of appeal to a higher court.

“Despite publicly stating its intention to abolish the death penalty, the Belarusian government continues to issue death sentences and execute prisoners,” said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International’s Director for Europe and Central Asia.

“President Alexander Lukashenko should establish an immediate moratorium on the death penalty, in line with successive UN General Assembly resolutions calling for a global moratorium. The Belarusian authorities must also release the bodies to the families of the two men,” he added.

In 2003, the UN Human Rights Committee ruled in the cases of two other executed prisoners that the secrecy surrounding the death penalty in Belarus punished the families and amounted to inhuman treatment.

The execution of Uladzslau Kavalyou took place despite an official request from the UN Human Rights Committee not to execute until his application to the Committee had been considered.

The exact date of Kavalyou and Kanavalau’s executions is not known, but on Saturday, Uladzslau Kavalyou’s mother Lubou received a letter from the Supreme Court dated 16 March, informing her that her son had been executed. The executions have also been confirmed by state-owned media.

Lubou Kavalyoua, who is campaigning for a moratorium on the death penalty in Belarus, last saw her son when she visited him in a remand prison in Minsk on 11 March. The two men were denied clemency by President Lukashenko on 14 March.

The letter sent to Lubou Kavalyoua is unusual practice. In the past, official notification that an execution has been carried out has not been sent to the relatives until weeks or months after the event.

Bodies are not released to the family, and the place of burial is kept secret, causing further distress to relatives.

Uladzslau Kavalyou's sister Tanya has told Amnesty International that security forces have attempted to prevent any demonstrations of grief near the apartment block where the family lives in Vitebsk, north-east Belarus, including the laying of flowers and lighting candles. Nevertheless, around 30 people left candles in the entrance to the building.

The case of Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzslau Kavalyou has received extensive media coverage in Belarus.

Dzmitry Kanavalau was found guilty of committing terrorist attacks and producing explosives, in connection with a series of bomb attacks in Belarus, most recently the Minsk attack.

Uladzslau Kavalyou was found guilty of assisting him and failing to inform the authorities.

There has been increasing public criticism surrounding the investigation and trial of Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzslau Kavalyou. Uladzslau Kavalyou's mother has said that both men were beaten during interrogation.

There is no forensic evidence linking either Dzmitry Kanavalau or Uladzslau Kavalyou to the explosion and no traces of explosives were found on either of them. Experts concluded that it would not have been possible for them to prepare the explosives in the basement they are alleged to have used.

Lubou Kavalyoua believes that the speed with which the executions were carried out is revenge for her attempts to fight for her son.

Belarus is the last country in Europe and the former Soviet Union which still carries out executions.

Condemned prisoners are given no warning that they are about to be executed, and they are usually executed within minutes of being told that their appeal for clemency has been rejected.

They are first taken to a room where, in the presence of the director of the detention facility, the prosecutor and one other Ministry of Interior employee, they are told that their appeal for clemency has been turned down and that the sentence will be carried out.

They are then taken to a neighbouring room where they are forced to their knees and shot in the back of the head.