

URGENT ACTION

OPPOSITION ACTIVIST TORTURED IN DETENTION

Andrei Sannikau, an opposition activist in Belarus and presidential candidate in the 19 December presidential election, has been tortured while in detention. Andrei Sannikau's lawyer reported that his legs appear to be broken and the way he speaks and holds himself indicates that he may have brain damage. He needs urgent medical attention.

Andrei Sannikau was injured when police broke up a protest against reported election rigging during the presidential election on 19 December. According to eyewitnesses, he was assaulted by police who pinned him down with a riot shield and repeatedly jumped onto it, severely injuring his legs. Friends attempted to drive him to hospital, but the car was stopped by police and Andrei Sannikau was dragged out of the car and arrested. Witnesses claim that at this time he had no visible head injuries. His wife, Iryna Khalip, who was travelling in the car with him, was punched in the face and arrested.

Andrei Sannikau's lawyer was allowed to visit him in detention on the evening of 20 December. According to the lawyer, Andrei Sannikau had new cuts and bruises on his arms, face and head, he was unable to stand and could barely move. The new injuries strongly suggest that Andrei Sannikau had been beaten again while in custody. The lawyer described his condition as "horrendous" and said that the way Andrei Sannikau spoke and held himself suggested he had suffered brain damage.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned that Andrei Sannikau may suffer irreversible brain damage and other injuries if he is not immediately transferred to a hospital where he can be given proper medical treatment. Amnesty International is also concerned that Andrei Sannikau remains at risk of torture as long as he is held in police custody.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Russian or your own language:

- Calling for the immediate transfer of Andrei Sannikau to a hospital where he can receive all the medical treatment required;
- Calling on the Belarusian authorities to take immediate action to ensure that Andrei Sannikau and the other presidential candidates are protected from torture or other ill-treatment at the hands of the police;
- Noting that Amnesty International considers him to have been detained solely for exercising his right to peaceful protest;
- Calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 FEBRUARY 2011 TO:

President

Alyaksandr Lukashenka

Administratsia Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus

ul. Karla Marksa, 38

220016 Minsk, BELARUS

Fax: +375 17 226 06 10/ +375 17 222 38 72

Email: contact@president.gov.by

Salutation: Dear President Lukashenka

Send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 264/10. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR49/010/2010/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Andrei Sannikau is a prominent Belarusian activist who formerly worked as Editor of Charter 97, an independent news website, and ran as an opposition candidate in the 19 December Presidential election in Belarus. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka won the election with just under 80% of the vote.

Prior to the election, opposition groups called on their supporters to gather in central Minsk after voting finished on 19 December. Up to 30,000 demonstrators gathered and marched to the parliament building unhindered by law enforcement officers, who stopped traffic to allow the demonstrators to pass. At around 9pm, they gathered outside the parliament building and opposition leaders gave speeches. At around 10pm, a group of about 20 masked young men who stood by the doors of parliament armed with batons called on the crowd to storm the building and started to break windows. Eyewitnesses report that Mykalau Statkevich, who was speaking at the time, called on the crowd to be peaceful. Shortly after this, riot police moved in and cleared the demonstrators from the Square.

Many opposition activists were detained at the demonstration and during the following night. Andrei Sannikau was injured during the break up of the demonstration and was detained by police officers on his way to hospital. His wife, Iryna Khalip, who was with him, reported the event live on air to a Russian radio station. Another, Uladzimir Nyaklyayeu was beaten by law enforcement officers as he made his way to the demonstration and was dragged from the intensive care department of a hospital by police officers. Among those detained is Natalya Radzina, the editor of Charter97 news website. There are eighteen in total.

Amnesty International believes that the group have been targeted for legitimately exercising their right to freedom of expression and will consider them to be prisoners of conscience if they are sentenced for organizing or participating in the events of 19 December.

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