

URGENT ACTION

PROTECT RIGHTS OF JUVENILE PRISONERS

Emil Ostrovko and Vasily Sauchankau are held in a juvenile prison in Belarus in conditions which violate their human rights and are subjected to harassment and discrimination by the prison authorities. Following flawed trials in 2018, they were sentenced to 10 years in prison each for minor drug offences. They were 17 years old at the time of their arrest. Their case is emblematic of thousands of teenagers imprisoned in appalling conditions following unfair trials for minor drug-related offences.

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

*Head of Corrective Colony, Syarhei Maslyukou
Corrective Colony No.2, vul. Batava 4
Babruisk 213807, Belarus
Email: vk2_mogilev@mia.by*

Dear Head of Colony,

*I am concerned about the treatment of **Emil Ostrovko** and **Vasily Sauchankau** who are held in your colony in inhumane conditions, that contravene the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), and are subjected to discrimination.*

Emil Ostrovko suffers from chronic bronchial asthma. However, the medication which he should have with him at all times is kept separately, which exposes him to a serious health risk. The colony also fails to provide regular health-checks which he requires.

The shoes and clothes provided by the colony are too small or seasonally inadequate and, due to poor facilities, often damp. Imprisoned when they were 17 years old, they have no access to educational provisions and instead are being forced to work long hours doing manually strenuous work without adequate rest or protective equipment. The poor quality and inadequate provision of food has seen both of them lose considerable weight. Furthermore, I understand that they are subjected to discrimination and are being targeted by the colony's authorities for particularly harsh treatment. I am concerned that they are being discriminated against because they were convicted for drug-related offences, including by being forced to wear clothes that differentiates them from other detainees, and they are denied access to the colony's recreational facilities. I have also learnt that parcels delivered by their families are being distributed amongst other prisoners.

I urge you to ensure that Emil Ostrovko is allowed to carry his vital medication with him at all times. Emil Ostrovko and Vasily Sauchankau, and every prisoner, must be provided with regular medical checks, adequate food, clothing and the necessary health and safety equipment to carry out any work required of them. They must be given adequate periods of rest and have access to educational provision and all recreational facilities in the colony. Their clothing should not differ to other prisoners and the authorities must cease harassing and targeting them.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In 2018, Emil Ostrovko and Vasily Sauchankau were sentenced in separate cases to 10 years in prison following their convictions in unfair trials for minor drug offences. They were both 17 years old at the time of their arrest. Following changes to the Criminal Code in January 2015, Belarus has adopted a zero-tolerance policy to drugs based on repressive and punitive laws.

Their cases highlight a burgeoning problem in Belarus which, some estimate, has resulted in up to 15,000 children and young people (up to age 29) being given similarly lengthy sentences for minor drug-related offences. In some cases, those arrested have not committed any crime and are framed for non-cooperation with the authorities, who try to use them to incriminate others. Suspects face countless human rights violations during the investigation and trial, and once they are sentenced they are kept in appalling conditions in violation of international standards. For those serving sentences on drugs convictions, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has advocated for prison conditions so awful that, in his words, the prisoners “will pray for death.”

The heavy reliance on criminal laws, repressive policies and other measures based on the prohibition of drugs has resulted in widespread human rights violations and abuses. Amnesty International calls on States to take a compassionate approach based on international human rights law and standards to ensure that drug control policies protect people, not harm them. In particular, Amnesty International is calling on States to decriminalize the use and possession of drugs for personal use and to implement alternatives to the criminalization of minor, non-violent drug-related offences.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian, Belarussian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 2 May 2019

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Emil Ostrovko (he/his) and Vasily Sauchankau (he/his).