

URGENT ACTION

VETERAN OPPOSITION FIGURE AT RISK IN DETENTION

There are credible reports that long-standing Belarusian political opposition activist, **Paval Sieviaryniec**, is being ill-treated in detention following his arrest on 7 June. As a prisoner of conscience, he must be released immediately and unconditionally and his safety and security until then must be guaranteed.

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

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Dear Prosecutor General,

I am writing to you to express my serious concern for the welfare of **Paval Sieviaryniec** who was arrested on 7 June near his home in Minsk and is currently being held in poor conditions in detention. Paval Sieviaryniec was sentenced to 75 days "administrative arrest" for his participation in earlier protests, in violation of his right to freedom of peaceful assembly. He is a prisoner of conscience who must be released immediately and unconditionally.

I am further concerned by credible reports that Paval Sieviaryniec is being subjected to ill-treatment. According to his wife and fellow detainees who have since been released, he has been unable to meet with his lawyer and has been kept in solitary confinement for up to ten days at a time. He is made to sleep on a bench without a mattress which is raised up against the wall every day from 6am to 10pm leaving only an iron stool in the cell. There is no running water in his cell and he is deprived of exercise. His personal belongings, hygiene products and warm clothes have been taken away from him. He is a devout Christian and his Bible has also been taken away from him. Until 29 June, the detention centre refused to receive any parcels for him from his wife and it is not known if the one that was finally accepted has been received by him.

In the light of the above, I call on you to release prisoner of conscience Paval Sieviaryniec immediately and unconditionally and ensure that neither he nor any person is held in such conditions, which constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Paval Sieviaryniec is the co-leader of the Christian Democratic Party and a vocal and long-standing critic of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. His detention on 7 June has taken place in the context of a huge and brutal crackdown on civil society and human rights ahead of the presidential election on 9 August.

In the face of unprecedented opposition mobilisation and public protests against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, throughout Belarus, the authorities have engaged in a ruthless crackdown which has seen leading presidential candidates smeared and arrested on trumped up charges and facing lengthy terms of imprisonment if convicted. Hundreds of their supporters, independent journalists, bloggers, online activists and bystanders have been detained during peaceful street protests and gatherings by law enforcement officers and gangs of unidentified men in plain clothes, often with the use of excessive force. Even young children are vulnerable as the authorities have threatened, on more than one occasion, to take into care the children of political activists. Hundreds of people have been arrested and fined or sentenced to “administrative detention”, and many are facing criminal charges for doing no more than peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of assembly and expression.

Amnesty International is calling on the Belarusian authorities to immediately end this escalating clampdown on human rights, to release all those who remain in detention solely for peacefully exercising their rights and bring all those responsible for human rights violations and abuses to account.

Paval Sieviaryniec was also named a prisoner of conscience in 2011, when he was sentenced to three years in a correctional facility after mass protests broke out in Belarus following the then presidential election. The crackdown on the political opposition and civil society which took place following the 2010 elections differs to the current one which is taking place months in advance of the election and in a context in which President Alyaksandr Lukashenka’s rating in the country is believed by many to be at an all-time low.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian, Russian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 11 August 2020

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Paval Sieviaryniec (he/his)