

URGENT ACTION

MARFA RABKOVA CHARGED WITH A FALSE CRIME

Following her detention on 17 September, woman human rights defender Marfa Rabkova was charged on 25 September under Article 293(3) of the Belarusian Criminal Code and faces imprisonment of up to three years if convicted. She is a prisoner of conscience, targeted solely for her peaceful human rights work and must be immediately and unconditionally released.

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

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Dear Prosecutor General

I am deeply worried about the criminal prosecution of **Marfa Rabkova**, a woman human rights defender and coordinator of the Volunteer Service of the Human Rights Center "Viasna".

Marfa Rabkova was detained on 17 September and on 25 September she was charged under Article 293(3) of the Criminal Code ("training or other preparation of persons to participate in riots, or funding of such activities") and faces up to three years in prison if convicted. She is currently remanded in pre-trial detention centre No. 1 in Minsk.

Marfa Rabkova is a prisoner of conscience who is being targeted for her legitimate activities as a human rights defender, such as observing demonstrations and documenting evidence of human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment of peaceful protesters by law enforcement officials. Marfa Rabkova has committed no crime. Prosecuting her for peacefully exercising her human rights and protecting the rights of others is a breach of Belarus' obligations under international human rights law.

The Belarusian authorities must stop persecuting members of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna" and other civil society activists and respect the rights to freedom of association and expression of all persons in Belarus.

I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Marfa Rabkova, as well as all other prisoners of conscience in Belarus, and to drop all charges against her.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Marfa Rabkova is a member of the Human Rights Center "Viasna" where she coordinates the organization's Volunteer Service. According to Viasna, throughout the presidential election campaign, during and after the 9 August election, members of Viasna faced harassment from the authorities, including administrative arrest, arbitrary detentions and attempted prosecution in connection with their human rights activities.

Marfa Rabkova and her husband, Vadzim Zharomski, were detained on the evening of 17 September by officers of the Interior Ministry's Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption (GUBAZIK). Their apartment was searched and money, personal belongings and IT equipment were seized. Vadzim Zharomski was later released but Marfa Rabkova was remanded for ten days as a suspect under Art. 293(3) of the Criminal Code.

The detention of human rights defender Marfa Rabkova comes in the context of a drastic deterioration in the human rights situation in Belarus. During the electoral campaign period and following the presidential election on 9 August, there have been mass peaceful protests against the widely disputed official results as well as against police violence and widespread human rights violations. Throughout, the authorities have engaged in an escalating campaign against the opposition and all dissenting voices. Thousands of people have been arbitrarily arrested by police, an overwhelming majority of them peaceful protesters or bystanders, and many apprehended in abduction-style arrest by masked plain-clothed men.

According to countless first-hand testimonies, widely available photographic and video material, and medical documents, many if not all of those detained have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. The detention centre on Akrestsina, in the capital Minsk, where Marfa Rabkova was initially held, has become synonymous with the practice of vicious beatings and sexual violence and other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Dozens of high-profile political and civil society activists and their associates have been arrested under trumped-up charges and subsequently remanded as criminal suspects – as is the case with Marfa Rabkova. They should all be immediately released, and all other human rights violations must stop immediately, including the dispersal of peaceful assemblies, mass arrests and the widespread ill-treatment and torture of detainees.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian, Russian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 26 January 2021

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Marfa Rabkova (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/3117/2020/en/>