

PUBLIC

AI Index: EUR 49/03/98

UA 92/98 Peaceful demonstrators reportedly beaten,
at least 20 detained

23 March 1998

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Between 20 and 50 people were arrested and beaten by police following a peaceful demonstration in the Belorussian capital Minsk on 22 March 1998. Amnesty International is urging the authorities to initiate prompt and impartial investigations into all allegations of ill-treatment of demonstrators by the police and to bring anyone found responsible to justice.

The demonstration was held to mark the 80th anniversary of the declaration of an independent state of Belorussia (as it was formerly known). Those detained included journalists and members of the opposition party, the Belorussian Nationalist Front. Women and minors, including a 15 year old boy, Pavel Rakhmanov, were also arrested.

Despite statements from Belorussian officials that the arrests were made in response to protestors throwing smoke bombs, unofficial sources maintain that the 10,000-strong demonstration was entirely peaceful.

Seven people have now been released, having been found guilty of shouting censored slogans and insulting the President, Alyaksandr Lukashenka. One man found guilty was fined 5 million Belorussian roubles (about \$100 USD), and two women were given warnings.

Five local members of the Helsinki Committee human rights group who attended the demonstration were also detained. They were released an hour later.

An unknown number of people are awaiting trial in detention centres. No further information is known at this stage.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International is concerned at the apparent pattern of ill-treatment and imprisonment of members of the opposition as a result of peaceful strikes and demonstrations in Belarus, and has repeatedly raised this with the Belorussian authorities.

The continuing arrests of journalists is also a matter of grave concern. In 1997, seven employees of the Russian television station ORT were detained and reportedly charged with violating Article 80 of the Belorussian Criminal code, under which illegal border-crossing is punishable by imprisonment of up to five years. Amnesty International considered the journalists to be prisoners of conscience, detained for their professional non-violent activities as media workers.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Russian or your own language:

- calling for the immediate release of any demonstrators held in police custody solely for exercising their right to freedom of assembly;
- seeking assurances that no-one in the future will be subjected to ill-treatment or imprisonment by the police solely on the grounds of their political beliefs and for peacefully expressing their right to freedom of assembly;
- urging the authorities to initiate prompt and impartial investigations into all allegations of ill-treatment of demonstrators by the police, and to bring anyone found responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to provide compensation to the victims of police abuse and to inform all law enforcement officials that torture and ill-treatment are prohibited in any circumstances under the provisions of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Belarus is a party as a successor state of the USSR.

APPEALS TO:

The President of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka
 Respublika Belarus
 220010 g. Minsk
 pl. Nezavisimosti
 Apparat Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus
 Prezidentu Respubliki Belarus Lukashenka A.H
 BELARUS

Telegrams: Prezidentu Lukashenko, Minsk, Belarus

Faxes: + 375 172 23-58-25 (working hours only)

Salutation: Dear President

The Procurator General of Belarus, Aleh Bozhelko
 Respublika Belarus
 220050 g. Minsk
 Ul. Internatsionalnaya, 22
 Prokuratura Respubliki Belarus
 Generalnomu prokuroru BOZHELKU A.
 BELARUS

Telegrams: Generalnomu prokuroru, Minsk, Belarus

Salutation: Dear Procurator General

Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, Mr Agolets, first name not known

Respublika Belarus

g. Minsk

Ul. Urytskaha, 5

Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del Respubliki Belarus

Ministru Agoletsu

BELARUS

Telegrams: Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del, Minsk, Belarus

Faxes: +375 172 26-12-47

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Ivan Antonovich

Respublika Belarus

220030 g.Minsk

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Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Respubliki Belarus

Ministru Antonovich I.

BELARUS

and to diplomatic representatives of Belarus accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 May 1998.