

EXTRA 21/02

Death Pen

BELARUSValery Ignatovich (m)
Maksim Malik (m)
Aleksey Guz (m)
Sergei Savushkin (m)

Valery Ignatovich, Maksim Malik, Aleksey Guz and Sergei Savushkin are due to be sentenced at Minsk Regional Court in the Belarusian capital on 11 March. Should they be found guilty of several charges of abduction and murder, including that of Russian Public Television cameraman, Dmitry Zavadsky, who went missing in July 2000, they may face imminent execution.

The four accused men, two of whom are former members of an elite police unit, have all pleaded not guilty to the charges against them. In mid-February, towards the end of the trial, the Public Prosecutor called for capital punishment for all four men.

In contravention of various international human rights standards the trial, which began in late October 2001, has been held behind closed doors. The Government offered no credible reason why the trial should not be open to public scrutiny and repeated requests for access to the proceedings from domestic human rights organizations were rejected. Dmitry Zavadsky's wife, Svetlana, was reportedly only allowed to attend the trial on the condition she did not disclose information about the trial proceedings.

Both international and domestic observers have argued that, although the four accused men may have been involved in the murder of Dmitry Zavadsky, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's immediate circle of appointees had organized this and other murders of prominent opposition figures. Repeated concern has been expressed that the four accused men will be convicted of the charges and then quickly executed in order to eradicate any evidence linking the President's administration to the crimes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The "disappearance" of the then 27-year-old Dmitry Zavadsky was only one of a series of abductions and possible murders in the period 1999 - 2000. Leading opposition figure, Yury Zakharenko, "disappeared" in Minsk in May 1999, followed by the senior opposition leader, Viktor Gonchar, and his companion, Anatoly Zavadsky, in September 1999. Investigations into these "disappearances" have been cloaked in controversy, eliciting domestic and international criticism relating to their perceived transparency, impartiality and lack of progress. High-level state involvement has been alleged in all three instances.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or Russian or your own language:

- urging the Belarusian authorities not to sentence Valery Ignatovich, Maksim Malik, Aleksey Guz and Sergei Savushkin to death;
- expressing concern about the continued use of the death penalty in Belarus;
- urging the Belarusian authorities to declare an official moratorium on executions;
- urging the Belarusian authorities to ensure that all available evidence pertaining to the "disappearance" of Dmitry Zavadsky as well as the other missing opposition figures is impartially and thoroughly examined, including evidence

suggesting state involvement, and those deemed guilty brought to trial in the course of fair proceedings.

APPEALS TO: (Please mark all appeals "URGENT - SROCHNO")

Due to an unreliable telephone system in Belarus, fax tones may be difficult to obtain. Please keep trying. Additionally, you may have the most success ringing during office hours as fax machines are sometimes turned off at the end of the working day (+3 hours GMT). If a voice answers, repeat "fax" until connected.

The President of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka
 Respublika Belarus
 220016 g. Minsk
 ul. Karla Marksa, 38, Administratsia Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus
 Presidentu Lukashenka A.H
 BELARUS

Telegrams: Presidentu Lukashenka, Minsk, Belarus
Faxes: + 375 172 26 06 10
Salutation: Dear President

The Chairman of the Supreme Court of Belarus, Valentin Sukalo
 Respublika Belarus
 220681 g. Minsk
 Ul. Lenina, 28
 Verkhovny Sud Respubliki Belarus
 Predsedatelyu Sukalo V.
 BELARUS

Telegrams: Sukalo, Verkhovniy Sud, Minsk, Belarus
Salutation: Dear Chairman

Minister of Justice of the Republic of Belarus Viktor Golovanov
 Respublika Belarus
 220084 g. Minsk
 ul. Kollektornaya, 10
 Ministerstvo yustitsii Respubliki Belarus
 Ministru GOLOVANOVA V.
 BELARUS

Telegram: Golovanov, Ministerstvo yustitsii, Minsk, Belarus
Fax: + 375 172 20 96 84 (If a voice answers, repeat "fax" until connected.)
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Mikhail Khvostov
 Respublika Belarus
 220030 g. Minsk
 Ul. Lenina, 19
 Ministerstvo inostrannykh del
 Respubliki Belarus
 Ministru Khostovu M.
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Salutation: Dear Foreign Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of Belarus accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.