

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FEATURE

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## **‘I can’t believe he’s not here any more’**

*Lubou Kavalyoua received a letter from the Belarus Supreme Court on 17 March 2012, informing her that her son, Uladzslau Kavalyou, had been executed. She had not been told beforehand. She talked to Amnesty International about her son, her ongoing search for his grave, and her fight against the death penalty in Belarus.*

Lubou Kavalyoua’s son, Uladzslau Kavalyou – known as Ulad – was arrested in connection with a bomb attack in Belarus in April 2011. After an unfair trial, he was sentenced to death in November 2011. Ulad, aged 26, only saw his lawyer three times during the whole process and was forced into confessing. He later retracted his testimony and there was never any forensic evidence linking him to the explosion. His sentence passed by the Supreme Court of Belarus, leaving no possibility of appeal.

### **What was your son like?**

Ulad was a cheerful, active boy, and he was shy. He loved music. He was always reading. He was fond of psychology, and that helped him a little in prison, because it was very difficult to endure. Ulad was very good to his friends, and his friendships lasted for years. And now his friends visit us, not very often, but they come and try to support me, and I feel better when they are with me.

### **Tell us what happened to him**

I learned about his arrest when police officers arrived one night with a search warrant. They didn’t say why our apartment was being searched, or why Ulad had been arrested. When a neighbour asked the officers searching our flat what had happened, one of them replied that Ulad had found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. They didn’t tell us anything else.

During the trial, people went to the courtroom every day and were not happy with what they observed. They still oppose the sentence. I know I should have been ready for it, but I was still hopeful. When the verdict was read out in the courtroom, I don’t remember what happened. I don’t even remember what Ulad communicated to me, although people tell me he signalled: “Mum don’t cry”.

### **How did you find out that he had been executed?**

On 13, 14 and 15 March, Ulad’s lawyer tried to see him but he wasn’t allowed. Of course, at that moment my heart didn’t give me a hint that Ulad was gone – I didn’t feel anything. But when I received the letter from the Supreme Court, I understood.

### **What have you done to find out where he is buried?**

We have asked Lukashenka (Alyaksandr Lukashenka – the President of Belarus) to issue a decree to release the bodies of the executed to their relatives, or at least to provide information about their burial place. There is no reason not to release the bodies to their relatives, or to hide the burial site. Lukashenka can at least tell us where Ulad’s grave is.

We asked the authorities to explain the reasons why, but they can’t tell us. I think they themselves don’t know where this law comes from – not to give the body to the family and not to reveal the burial place. It is torture for the mother. They tortured my child to obtain the

necessary testimony, and now they are just torturing me.

**What drove you to campaign against the death penalty?**

At the beginning it was fear. I have seen how evidence is obtained, and that testimony is considered to be evidence, regardless of how it is obtained.

I don't know if we will succeed, but I think it is still possible with the help of society, of the people. It is possible to change the legislation and eventually abolish the death penalty.

More than 400 people have been executed in Belarus in the past two decades: no one spoke about it, no one ever said anything, and the prisoners were shot. Everybody should know about it.

**The death penalty in Belarus: the facts**

- Belarus is the only country in Europe and central Asia that still carries out executions.
- Prisoners risk being tortured into “confessing”.
- Condemned prisoners do not have access to an effective legal appeal.
- Executions are carried out by shooting the condemned person in the back of the head.
- Prisoners are only informed hours, or even minutes, before they are executed.
- Prisoners’ bodies are not returned to their families for burial, and families are not told where they are buried.

Photos of Lubou Kavalyoua and her son Uladzslau Kavalyou are available on:

<http://bit.ly/10J8zxB>

*This feature was originally published on The Wire in March 2013 <http://www.amnesty.org/pt-br/library/info/NWS21/002/2013/en>*