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Belarus: After death, the cruelty continues as bodies of two executed men still hidden

The bodies of two men executed a year ago in Belarus must be released to their relatives for burial or the burial site should be revealed, Amnesty International said today.

Uladzslau Kavalyou and Dzmitry Kanavalau were executed in March 2012 in Minsk, capital of Belarus. They had been sentenced to death on 30 November 2011 after being found guilty in connection to a bomb attack in Minsk that killed 15 people and wounded more than 300 in April 2011.

Their trial has been criticized for failing to meet international fair trial standards.

According to the death certificate received by his mother, Uladzslau Kavalyou died on 15 March 2012. On 16 March, she received a letter from the Belarusian Supreme Court informing her that her son had been executed.

“The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and a human rights violation. Failing to return the bodies of these two men compounds that cruelty,” said David Diaz-Jogeix, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia.

“The letter sent to Lubou Kavalyoua is unusual practice. In most cases, official notification of executions is not sent to the relatives until weeks or months after the event. The complete secrecy surrounding the death penalty denies families the opportunity to bury their relatives according to their traditions and religious beliefs.”

Article 175 of the Criminal Executive Code of the Republic of Belarus allows for the government not to communicate the place of burial of those executed to their relatives.

“It is unacceptable that authorities in Belarus would not even reveal the burial site to the families, and ban them from saying goodbye to their loved ones,” said Diaz-Jogeix.

“Article 175 is outrageous and must be immediately amended. President Lukashenka should also immediately declare a moratorium on executions, pending the eventual full abolition of the death penalty.”

Belarus is the only country in Europe that still sentences people to death. Executions are carried out by shooting the individual in the back of the head.

Prisoners are only informed hours, or even minutes, before they are executed.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception.

Background information on the death penalty in Belarus:

- 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.