

AI Index: PRE 01/610/2011
09 December 2011

Over 250,000 people call on Belarus to end executions

Amnesty International and Belarusian human rights organizations Viasna and Belarus Helsinki Committee were today turned away from delivering a global petition to Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, calling for an end to executions in Belarus.

Over 250,000 signatures from all over the world were collected by Amnesty International's global membership and the Belarusian organizations. The petition, which began as a local initiative, became a focus of Amnesty International's 50th anniversary campaign against the death penalty.

"This petition sends a strong signal to the Belarusian President that people from all over the world want to see an end to executions in Belarus," said John Dalhuisen, Deputy Programme Director of the Europe and Central Asia Programme at Amnesty International.

"As the last country in Europe and the former Soviet Union which still carries out executions, we would like to see the Belarusian authorities respond positively to this worldwide, public call," he added.

The playwright, Tom Stoppard, signed the petition as the 100,000th signatory and the actor and human rights activist, Vanessa Redgrave, was the closing signatory.

The attempted delivery of the petition comes only days after two men were sentenced to death in Belarus, following a high-profile trial that Amnesty International believes failed to meet international fair trial standards. Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzslau Kavalyou were found guilty of a series of bomb attacks in Belarus, most recently in a Minsk metro station in April, which killed 15 people and injured two hundred.

They were sentenced on 30 November by the Supreme Court, leaving no recourse for appeal other than for clemency to the President, in violation of international law. If clemency is refused, they may be shot within minutes of being told.

The swiftness of Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzslau Kavalyou's arrest has led to scepticism about the investigation process. There are allegations that they were tortured and ill-treated in order to get them to confess and there is no forensic evidence linking either of them to the explosion and no traces of explosives were found on either of them.

Following their sentencing, Uladzslau's mother, Lyubov Kavalyou told the media "This sentence was not issued on the case material. My son is not guilty. He did not take part in this terrorist act ... he is not a criminal."

At a press conference in Minsk today, Lyubov Kavalyou said that when she last saw her son, a week ago, he had visible wounds to his wrists. He is constantly handcuffed to the bed, by one hand during the day and by both hands at night.

In an unprecedented show of public support for Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzslau Kavalyou within Belarus, a petition against their anticipated execution was signed by over 50,000 people and other petitions are flooding in.

“The delivery of our petition today brings Belarusian and international voices together in a clear message to the President to end this barbaric practice now,” said John Dalhuisen.

Signatures were gathered in Austria, Belgium, Bermuda, Canada (Francophone), Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Moldova, Mongolia, Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. The petition will now be sent by post to the President.

Notes to editors

For further information on the death penalty in Belarus:
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR49/001/2009/en>

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org
International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org