

# PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: EUR 49/012/2007

## Belarus: Amnesty International and Belarusian Helsinki Committee condemn reported execution

Amnesty International and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee condemn the reported recent execution of Alyaksandr Syarheychyk by the Belarusian authorities. Alyaksandr Syarheychyk was found guilty of murder, rape, theft of firearms and other crimes on 22 May 2007 and sentenced to death.

Amnesty International and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee are urging the Belarusian authorities to immediately clarify, in writing, the details of Alyaksandr Syarheychyk's case, emphasising that if he has been executed, his relatives should have received full access to information including the dates and places of execution and burial, and have been allowed to collect the prisoner's remains and any personal effects.

In accordance with UN resolution 2005/59, adopted on 20 April 2005, the UN Commission on Human Rights calls upon all states that still maintain the death penalty "to make available to the public information with regard to the imposition of the death penalty and to any scheduled execution."

It has been stressed to the Belarusian authorities that the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has stated that "transparency is essential wherever the death penalty is applied. Secrecy as to those executed violates human rights standards. Full and accurate reporting of all executions should be published and a consolidated version prepared on at least an annual basis."

Amnesty International and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee oppose the death penalty in all cases, without exception. The death penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights, violating the right to life as proclaimed in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

The recent resolution calling for a moratorium on executions at the Third Committee of the United Nations on 15 November calls upon states that still maintain the death penalty "to establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty." It urges these states, including Belarus, "to respect international standards that provide safeguards guaranteeing the protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty", "to provide the Secretary-General with information relating to the use of capital punishment" and "progressively restrict the use of the death penalty and reduce the number of offences for which it may be imposed."

### **Background**

Belarus is the only country in Europe and the former Soviet Union that still executes prisoners. Belarus maintains the death penalty for "premeditated, aggravated murder" and 12 other peacetime offences. There are no figures available to date for the number of executions carried out in 2007. Execution is by a gunshot to the back of the head, and relatives are not officially told of the date of the execution or where the body is buried. On 16 November, commenting on the UN Resolution on a Global Moratorium on the Death Penalty that was passed on 15 November, the Minister of Internal Affairs told journalists that it was too early to introduce a moratorium in Belarus.

For more information please contact:

Lydia Aroyo. Press Officer, Europe & Central Asia, Amnesty International, Tel.: +44 20 7413 5500

Dzmitry Markusheuski. The Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Tel.: +375 29 709 57 02