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Belarus: Death row prisoner executed in secret

Amnesty International strongly condemns the execution of death row prisoner, Pavel Selyun, in Belarus and the way it was communicated with total disregard for the rights of his family. According to the Belarusian NGO, Human Rights Centre Viasna, he was executed some time over the Easter period. He had appealed to President Lukashenka for clemency. Pavel Selyun's mother was not informed that clemency had been denied to her son, nor that he was due to be executed, in violation of international standards.

His mother was not given any opportunity to have a final meeting with her son and had actually been planning to visit him in the near future. She only found out about his death from her lawyer after she went to meet him in prison, but was told instead "he has departed, in accordance with his sentence." Pavel Selyun's mother had also appealed to President Lukashenka and the Head of the Belarusian Orthodox Church in an attempt to save his life, requesting that his death sentence be changed to life imprisonment.

Furthermore, Pavel Selyun's case was pending with the UN Human Rights Committee, the body overseeing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Belarus is a state party. The Committee had requested that the sentence not be carried out until it had considered the case, but, as in previous instances, the Belarusian authorities carried out the execution regardless.

It is extremely disappointing that following a year in which no executions took place, Belarus has chosen to execute Pavel Selyun. In doing so, Belarus remains the last executioner in the whole of Europe and Central Asia and has ignored not just its legal human rights obligations but also the clear global trend towards abolition of the death penalty.

No executions were carried out in Belarus in 2013, for the first time since 2009. There were two executions in both 2010 and 2011 and at least three in 2012. However, at least four death sentences were imposed in 2013, including that of Pavel Selyun who was sentenced to death on 12 June 2013 for the murder of his wife and her lover in 2012. His appeal was turned down by the Supreme Court on 17 September. The Supreme Court has also already rejected an appeal by Rygor Yuzepchuk, sentenced to death on 24 April 2013, who is now at imminent risk of execution.

In Belarus, death sentences are implemented in strict secrecy and without giving adequate notice to the prisoners, their families or their legal representatives. Condemned prisoners are given no warning that they are about to be executed; instead they are taken out of their cells, told that their appeal for clemency has been turned down, and then forced to their knees and shot in the back of the head. Their families are only informed days or sometimes weeks later that their relative has been executed. The Criminal Executive Code allows the authorities to refuse to return the bodies of those executed to their families or to even inform them of the location of the burial site. In October 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus stated: "The way the death penalty is carried out in Belarus amounts to inhuman treatment."

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception. It violates the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

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