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UN Human Rights Council
Twenty-sixth Session
10 – 27 June 2014

Item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Oral intervention in interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus

Delivered by Patrizia Scannella – **Video link:** <http://goo.gl/a6x7pf> (statement number 32)

Mr. President

Amnesty International has submitted a written statement on death penalty in Belarus to this session of the Human Rights Council.¹

Following 24 months in which there were no executions, at least two men have been executed in Belarus in 2014; two other men are believed to be at imminent risk of execution.

Belarus' continued disregard for internationally recognized safeguards on the application of the death penalty, as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and elsewhere, violates the human rights of those sentenced to death or executed and members of their families. This includes the denial of fair trials, the secrecy surrounding executions and the consistent failure of the Belarusian authorities to heed calls by the Human Rights Committee to stay executions while individual complaints are considered.

Belarus continues to ignore the Human Rights Council's calls to ensure that all affected are informed about pending executions, to allow a last visit or communication, and to return the body to the family for burial or to say where it body is located.² Such callous indifference was again demonstrated recently in a chilling communication to the mother of executed prisoner Pavel Selyun informing her that her son "... has departed, with his belongings, in accordance with his sentence. [...] The body will not be returned and the place of burial will not be disclosed."

Family members of prisoners described their suffering when learning of the executions after the event, and not being able to bury the bodies of their loved ones. We agree with the assessment of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus that the way the death penalty is carried out in Belarus amounts to inhuman treatment.³

The authorities' assertion that Belarusian society is not ready for abolition is contradicted by the 2013 survey conducted by Penal Reform International and Belarus Helsinki Committee.⁴ While 64% of Belarusians supported the death penalty generally, a margin of support significantly lower than claimed by the government, only 37% supported capital punishment unconditionally and, in fact, there was widespread support for alternatives, such as life sentences or a moratorium on executions.

Mr. President,

¹ 'The death penalty, Belarus, and the UN Human Rights Council – more of the same?' Amnesty International's written statement to the 26th session of the UN Human Rights Council (10 - 27 June 2014). UN Index: A/HRC/26/NGO/113, AI Index: EUR 49/006/2014.

² Resolution 19/37 "Rights of the child", adopted without a vote on 23 March 2012, operative paragraph 69 (f).

³ UN document A/HRC/23/52, 18 April 2013, paragraph 45.

⁴ <http://www.penalreform.org/resource/belarusian-public-opinion-crime-punishment-including-death-penalty/> (accessed 12 June 2014).

Amnesty International urges the Human Rights Council to clearly condemn the use of the death penalty in Belarus.

We urge the Belarusian government to:

- Promptly establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty;
- Immediately commute all death sentences to terms of imprisonment; and
- End all secrecy surrounding the use of the death penalty.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all circumstances as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Thank you, Mr. President.