

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST THREATENED WITH RAPE AND TORTURE

Activist and prisoner of conscience Zmitser Dashkevich is being threatened with rape and torture in a penal colony in Mazyr, south-west Belarus, where he was transferred after his sentence on 28 August for allegedly violating prison rules entered into force.

On 26 September, the lawyer and the fiancée of **Zmitser Dashkevich** visited Mazyr penal colony number 20, where Zmitser Dashkevich arrived on 19 September. His lawyer was able to see him, but his fiancée was not allowed. Visits from relatives had been banned two days after his arrival at the colony. Zmitser Dashkevich told his lawyer that he was being subjected to verbal abuse and threats to his life. Penal colony authorities were threatening him with torture and compulsory psychological medical treatment. In addition, Zmitser Dashkevich was told he may be subjected to rape by his cell mates.

Penal colony authorities told Zmitser Dashkevich's fiancée that if information about his treatment became public it would directly affect his treatment in the colony and his health. In response to pressure from penal colony authorities and his treatment, Zmitser Dashkevich started a hunger strike on 21 September, which is ongoing. He is not allowed to receive food parcels.

Following his conviction on 28 August for violating prison rules, on 4 September Zmitser Dashkevich was transferred to a prison in Vitebsk where detainees are held on remand. Between 12 and 19 September his whereabouts were unknown. During this time, his lawyer and fiancée tried to visit him several times. They were told that Zmitser Dashkevich was not there, but was being transferred to another detention facility. No further details were offered as to when or where he was transferred. On 14 September the authorities of the remand prison told the lawyer that they didn't have the official documents regarding his sentence. On 20 September, his fiancée received a letter from the Department of Penitentiary Institutions at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, saying that Zmitser Dashkevich had been transferred to the penal colony in Mazyr.

Please write immediately in Belarusian, Russian or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to ensure that Zmitser Dashkevich is not tortured or ill-treated by state officials or third parties and reminding the authorities that they have a duty to protect the physical and psychological wellbeing of those in custody;
- Calling on the Belarusian authorities to stop the harassment of Zmitser Dashkevich;
- Reminding the Belarusian authorities that Zmitser Dashkevich is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for the peaceful expression of his political views and that he should be released immediately and unconditionally, along with all other prisoners of conscience.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 NOVEMBER 2012 TO:

General Prosecutor

Alexander Koniuk
Ul. Internatsionalnaya 22
220030 Minsk, Belarus
Fax: +375 17 226 42 52

Salutation: Dear General Prosecutor

Minister of Internal Affairs

Igor Shunevich
Ul. Gorodskoi Val 4
220030 Minsk, Belarus
Fax: +375 17 203 99 18

Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 217/12. Further information: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR49/016/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zmitser Dashkevich is one of four prisoners of conscience currently imprisoned in Belarus in connection with a largely peaceful demonstration on 19 December 2010. Tens of thousands of Belarusians gathered in central Minsk to protest against unfair elections. The demonstration was mostly peaceful, but when a violent incident broke out at the doors of Government House, riot police moved in to disperse the crowds. Zmitser Dashkevich was sentenced to two years in a labour colony on 24 March 2011 for alleged assault under article 339 (“hooliganism”) on 18 December 2010, the day before the election. Amnesty International believes the charges against him are unfounded and were fabricated in order to prevent him taking part in the demonstration on 19 December 2010. Since his conviction in March 2011, Zmitser Dashkevich has repeatedly been exposed to a pressure from the prison administration. By September 2011, he had been placed in a punishment cell eight times, and he has spent most of his time since then in the punishment cell. Conditions are particularly harsh in such cells: prisoners are not allowed bedding despite the temperature often falling to 15 degrees Celsius during the winter. Prisoners in the punishment cells are also not allowed any visitors or correspondence. In September Zmitser Dashkevich was offered the chance to apply for a Presidential pardon if he admitted his guilt, but he rejected the offer. Zmitser Dashkevich is considered to be a “malignant violator” of the prison rules and he is not allowed to have family visits. The continuing harassment of Zmitser Dashkevich for allegedly violating prison rules appears to be intended to put physical and psychological pressure on him.

In September 2011, Zmitser Dashkevich was subjected to over 10 days of transportation between prison colonies. Transferring between detention centres is very stressful for prisoners, both physically and mentally. Detainees are transported in poor conditions, and frequently deprived of food and water.

On 28 August 2012, Zmitser Dashkevich was sentenced to a further year in prison for allegedly violating prison rules under Article 411 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (“deliberate disobedience to the correctional institution administration”).

The four prisoners of conscience in connection with these events are:

Mykalau Statkevich sentenced to six years on 26 May 2011

Pavel Sevyarynets sentenced to three years on 16 May 2011

Zmitser Dashkevich sentenced to two years on 24 March 2011 and to a further year on 28 August 2012

Eduard Lobau sentenced to four years on 24 March 2011

Name: Zmitser Dashkevich

Gender m/f: M

Further information on UA: 217/12 Index: 49/017/2012 Issue Date: 1 October 2012