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PUBLIC STATEMENT

BELARUS

Prisoner of conscience beaten and dragged into Minsk court

Amnesty International condemns yesterday's brutal treatment of prisoner of conscience and former member of parliament Andrey Klimov who was reportedly beaten and kicked by prison officials and dragged into a Minsk court room in torn clothes and without shoes.

Andrey Klimov is a member of the parliament dissolved by President Lukashenka in November 1996. He has been in pre-trial detention since February 1998 after being charged with financial impropriety, a charge he has denied. Amnesty International considers Andrey Klimov to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned for peacefully opposing President Lukashenka's forced dissolution of parliament.

The ill-treatment allegedly occurred after Andrey Klimov refused to leave his prison cell and go to the Leninsky court, protesting he has not received a fair trial. On 8 and 9 December the judge presiding over the Leninsky court refused to allow Andrey Klimov's defence to bring key witnesses to testify. He was ejected from the court room after questioning the independence and objectivity of the court.

Prison officials allegedly forced him to the cell floor and kicked him. He was then placed in a prison vehicle and driven to the Leninsky court, where he was reportedly dragged into the building. Eye-witnesses maintain he struggled to walk from the prison vehicle to and from the court building.

An ambulance was called to the court, but the judge presiding over the court refused to allow the defendant to be taken to hospital. It was later determined that Andrey Klimov suffered significant bruising, a possible fractured or dislocated arm and concussion as a result of his ill-treatment by prison officials.

The organization believes his ill-treatment violates international human rights standards regarding the treatment of detainees.

Background

In November 1996 Andrey Klimov took an active part in the impeachment of President Lukashenka. After the dissolution of parliament he continued his criticism of the president accusing him of violating the law and the constitution. Furthermore, he produced several documents to this effect. It is alleged that Andrey Klimov was arrested within days of distributing such a document to the procurator, police department and all heads of local government in the country.

Since being in prison he has always insisted upon his innocence and has undertaken two hunger strikes. As a result of the second hunger strike he was admitted to a prison hospital in July 1998 where he was reportedly diagnosed as suffering from a heart condition. He has since been transferred back to the prison but his state of health is reported to be poor. Amnesty International continues to be concerned about the state of his health and has expressed concern about the cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions of his imprisonment. The organization is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

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UK, on + 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>**