

URGENT ACTION

VIKTAR PAULAU MAY HAVE BEEN EXECUTED

Viktar Paulau has been at imminent risk of execution after the Supreme Court of Belarus upheld his conviction and death sentence on 12 November 2019. His sister was denied permission to visit him on 10 June, and when his lawyer enquired about his whereabouts, he was told that his client was no longer in the detention centre. The family fears that he may have been executed. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, without exception, as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Volha Ivanauna Chupris
Chairperson of the Clemency Commission
Presidential Administration
Vul. Karla Marksa 38
Minsk, Belarus
Email: contact@president.gov.by

Dear Ms Chupris,

*I am writing to express my concern that **Viktar Paulau** may be at imminent risk of execution or may have been executed. His sister was recently denied permission to see him and on 10 June officials at the pre-trial detention centre informed his lawyer that he is not in the detention centre. This is usually the first sign for families that their relative may have been executed.*

The treatment of the relatives of those on death row has been classified as torture and other ill-treatment by the UN Human Rights Committee. Relatives are usually only informed after an execution has been carried out by receiving the death certificate in the post weeks or months later and they are not permitted to have the body for burial.

Viktar Paulau was found guilty of the murder of two people in December 2018. According to local human rights defenders, there were irregularities in the court hearing which violated his right to a fair trial. He was convicted and sentenced to death on 30 July 2019 by the Viciebsk Regional Court whose sentence was upheld by the Supreme Court on 12 November 2019.

The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and should be abolished. Belarus remains the only country in Europe and the former Soviet Union which still carries out executions.

In light of the above, I urge you to:

- ***Immediately halt the execution of Viktar Paulau and all those on death row in Belarus;***
- ***Immediately establish an official moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty;***
- ***Commute all death sentences to terms of imprisonment.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Despite continuing dialogue between the international community and the Belarusian authorities on the establishment of a moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition, Belarus executed at least two men in 2019 and sentenced three men to death.

Belarus remains the only country in the whole of Europe and the former Soviet Union which still implements death sentences.

In Belarus, death sentences are often imposed after unfair trials; they are implemented in strict secrecy and without giving adequate notice to the condemned prisoners themselves, their families or legal representatives. If relatives enquire about the prisoner after he has been executed they are usually told that he has left the detention centre, but they are not told that he has been executed until they receive the death certificate. The authorities refuse to return the bodies of those executed to their relatives or even tell them where they are buried. The secrecy surrounding executions in Belarus has been identified by the UN as amounting to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of the relatives. Executions are carried out despite requests from the UN Human Rights Committee to the government not to do so until the Committee has considered the cases.

By failing to publish full information about the use of the death penalty, including comprehensive statistics about the number of death sentences imposed and executions carried out, the Belarusian authorities prevent informed public debate about the issue and hamper the movement towards abolition. As of today, 142 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. In 2018, executions were reported in 20 countries worldwide, 10% of the world total. Of these executing countries, only 13 were “persistent” executioners, meaning that they carried out executions every year in the previous five years. In 2017, Guinea and Mongolia each abolished the death penalty for all crimes and Guatemala became abolitionist for ordinary crimes only. In February 2018, the President of Gambia declared an official moratorium on executions. The country carried out its last executions in 2012, but under the leadership of its new administration it signed the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in September 2017. Burkina Faso was the last country to have removed the death penalty from its Criminal Code in June 2018.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian, Belarusian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 August 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Viktor Paulau (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/1493/2019/en/>