

URGENT ACTION

TORTURED DETAINEE DENIED MEDICAL CARE

Viachaslau Rahashchuk is a taxi driver from the Belarusian city of Pinsk who was arbitrarily detained in 10 August and remains behind bars. He is in need of urgent medical treatment due to injuries he sustained from being tortured while in detention.

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

Yauhen Syarheevich Khitryk

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Dear Mr Khitryk,

*I am writing to express my grave concern for the health of taxi driver **Viachaslau Rahashchuk**, who is currently remanded in the pre-trial detention centre No. 6 and is suffering from serious health conditions which are the result of torture and other ill-treatment and require immediate hospitalisation.*

Viachaslau Rahashchuk was violently and arbitrarily arrested by at least five police officers in Pinsk on the evening of 10 August while walking with his sister and her 12-year old son. Protests in the town were continuing following mass allegations of electoral fraud and the previous day's official announcement of the election results. He has committed no crime and his arrest and detention are arbitrary. He has been charged under Article 293 Part 1 of the Belarusian Criminal Code (mass riots) which carries a prison sentence of up to 15 years.

On 11 August, one of Viachaslau Rahashchuk's former cellmates contacted his mother and told her that Viachaslau Rahashchuk had been very badly beaten by prison officers. He said Viachaslau Rahashchuk had a hematoma behind his ear, three cuts to his head and bruises all over his spine. He also described there being pools of blood in the corridors from all those who were beaten.

Since then, Viachaslau Rahashchuk has had a continuous ringing noise in his head. When his family asked for him to be sent for a head-scan they were told by a medic at the detention centre that he is fine and to keep sending him medication to help with his symptoms. According to recent credible reports, Viachaslau Rahashchuk has been losing consciousness for up to twenty minutes at a time and has developed a tumour on the left side of his ribcage. The continued requests from his family for him to be examined by an independent doctor have been declined, and he is not receiving the medical treatment he urgently requires.

I urge you to:

- *Immediately transfer Viachaslau Rahashchuk to a hospital with adequate medical facilities to assess and treat his deteriorating health condition;*
- *Take any steps within your powers to ensure that Viachaslau Rahashchuk is not returned to pre-trial detention but released immediately and unconditionally as he has committed no crime and like, thousands of others in Belarus since 9 August, has been detained arbitrarily.*

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Viachaslau Rahushchuk's case is representative of the widespread and egregious human rights violations that continue against those in Belarus who express dissent, as well as every-day people, following the beginning of mass peaceful protests against the widely contested results of the presidential election on 9 August. Belarus is facing its most serious human rights crisis in its post-independence history.

Opposition activists, journalists and bloggers, those expressing dissent, peaceful protesters and, as in the case of Viachaslau, by-standers, have been swept up in their thousands by law enforcement officers, many of whom operate in plain clothes, with no identifying insignia and often using excessive force. Current estimates are that over 30,000 people have been detained since 9 August. Thousands have faced proceedings under the Code of Administrative Offences resulting in fines or periods of "administrative detention" up to 15 days which can be imposed consecutively leading to much longer periods of detention. Over 900 people have been charged under the Criminal Code under various Articles and are facing prison sentences of up to 15 years. Others have already been sentenced to terms of imprisonment. Hundreds of peaceful protesters continue to be detained weekly. All those who have been targeted solely for exercising their human rights are prisoners of conscience and must be immediately and unconditionally released.

Local and international human rights organisations have collected hundreds of testimonies of detainees who have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment at the time of arrest, during transportation and while in pre-trial detention. As yet, not a single investigation has been opened by the Belarusian authorities against law enforcement officers. This continuing failure by the Belarusian authorities to hold the perpetrators of such serious human rights violations to account is leading to increasing calls for the creation an international tribunal to ensure justice is secured.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian or Russian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 8 February 2021

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Viachaslau Rahashchuk (he/him)