

21 November 2000

AI Index EUR 49/025/2000 - News Service Nr. 220

Belarus: Immediate action needed to end torture

The Belarus government should immediately implement the UN Committee against Torture's recommendations to stop torture, said Amnesty International today.

Belarus' disturbing human rights record was once again in the international spotlight yesterday afternoon, as the UN Committee presented the conclusions and recommendations of its four-yearly review of Belarus.

"The Committee's findings on the overall human rights situation in Belarus testify to the extent which basic human rights have been trampled on in the country in past years," Amnesty International stated today. "Belarus should draw the necessary lessons from the Committee's damning report and take immediate steps to put human rights back on the country's agenda."

The Geneva-based UN Committee expressed concern about the overall deterioration of the human rights situation since Belarus' last review in 1992. It stated that there were numerous continuing allegations of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment -- particularly affecting political opponents of the government and peaceful demonstrators.

Amnesty International has received numerous reports of human rights violations, including the possible "disappearances" of leading opposition figures, arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of peaceful protestors.

Amnesty International has for many years documented human rights violations in Belarus, which were often committed with impunity. The organization has recorded a pattern of failure of officials to conduct prompt, impartial and full investigations into the many allegations of torture reported to the authorities, and to prosecute alleged perpetrators. To date the organization knows of no single incident when the perpetrators have been brought to justice.

With regard to the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators the UN Committee calls for urgent and effective steps to establish prompt, impartial and full investigations into the many allegations of torture reported to the authorities. The Committee also presses for the creation of an independent and impartial national human rights commission to investigate all complaints of human rights violations, and to effectively promote human rights.

"If Belarus' President, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, hopes to salvage his country's battered human rights image abroad, he should take immediate action to implement the Committee's recommendations," said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International welcomes the Committee's recommendations which appear to be designed to engender greater transparency and accountability on the part of the Belarusian authorities and to open up their behaviour to external scrutiny.

"There can be little doubt that the Committee against Torture's concerns and recommendations indicate there is much to be done in Belarus. The Belarusian authorities should see the Committee's report as an opportunity to take the country forward away from their regressive human rights practices of the present and recent past."

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>