

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: EUR 49/008/2010  
30 September 2010

**Belarus: Amnesty International urges abolition of the death penalty, an end to torture and ill-treatment to force confessions and allow NGOs to operate freely**

### ***Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Belarus***

No less than 14 States raised concerns about the death penalty in the review of Belarus. A/HRC/15/16, paragraphs 98.16 and 98.17 (Brazil, Lithuania, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Austria Hungary, Norway, Ireland, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Belgium, Finland and France). Amnesty International joins them in urging the government to declare an immediate moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty. In a recent meeting with Amnesty International, the head of the Belarusian Parliamentary Working Group on the death penalty confirmed that declaring a moratorium on executions does not require a referendum.

Belarus is the only country in Europe to continue to carry out executions. In March this year, Vasily Yuzepchuk and Andrei Zhuk were executed by a shot to the back of the head. Andrei Burdyko and Oleg Gryshkovtsov, both on death row in Minsk, had their appeals dismissed on 17 September 2010.

Amnesty International is also greatly concerned that prisoners and their relatives are not informed in advance of the date of execution; in some cases relatives do not know for weeks or even months that an execution has taken place. Svetlana Zhuk, the mother of Andrei, was not given her son's body for burial and has not been told where he is buried.

There is credible evidence that, under pressure to solve crimes, police investigators sometimes resort to torture and other ill-treatment in order to force confessions. These confessions are subsequently admitted as evidence in trials. Amnesty International notes that Belarus has committed to ensure fair trials and to strictly respect the absolute prohibition of torture. *Ibid*, paragraph 97.28 (Austria). The organization welcomes Belarus' commitment, announced in the Addendum, to introduce a definition of torture in national legislation which reflects Article 1 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. A/HRC/15/16, paragraphs 98.21 (Czech Republic) and A/HRC/15/16/Add.1, paragraph 59. It encourages Belarus to implement these recommendations without delay. Amnesty International further calls on the government to ensure prompt, impartial and comprehensive investigation into all complaints of torture and other ill-treatment, as recommended in the review. A/HRC/15/16, 98.22 and 98.23 (Italy and Spain).

Amnesty International urges the authorities to take the necessary measures to ensure freedom of expression and association for all, including by simplifying the registration procedures for non-governmental organizations, and by abolishing Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code. *Ibid*, paragraphs 98.27-98.30 (Lithuania, Norway, Canada, Belgium, Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Switzerland). In this regard, the organization urges the authorities to comply with the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee of 24 July 2007 to register the human rights organization, *Nasha Vyasna* (Our Spring), and to compensate the organization for causing it to be dissolved in 2003.

**Background**

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Belarus on 23 September 2010 during its 15<sup>th</sup> session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered the oral statement above. Amnesty International also contributed to the information basis of the review through its submission on Belarus:  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR49/015/2009/en>

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