

URGENT ACTION

MARFA RABKOVA MUST BE IMMEDIATELY RELEASED

The next hearing in the trial against Belarusian human rights defender Marfa Rabkova has been scheduled on 25 April. She has been in pretrial detention since September 2020 and risks a lengthy jail sentence simply for her legitimate human rights work as coordinator of the volunteer network of the NGO Viasna. The prison authorities have been denying her the urgent medical care she requires for months, despite worrying symptoms and a deterioration of her health. Marfa Rabkova must be immediately and unconditionally released.

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

Prosecutor General of the Republic of Belarus
Andrei Shved
Internatsiyanalnaya str. 22 220030 Minsk
Belarus
Email: info@prokuratura.gov.by

Dear Prosecutor General,

I am deeply concerned about the criminal prosecution of **Marfa Rabkova**, a woman human rights defender and coordinator of the Volunteer Service of the Human Rights Center "Viasna", whose court hearing is scheduled for 25 April.

Marfa Rabkova was detained on 17 September 2020 and was initially charged with 'training and other preparation of people for participation in mass riots', 'incitement of racial, national, religious or other social hatred or discord committed by a group', and 'membership of a criminal organization' and was facing up to 12 years in prison. In late November 2021 she was charged with additional counts, bringing it to a total of 11 and she is now facing up to 20 years in prison.

Marfa Rabkova's health is deteriorating rapidly following months of inadequate medical care since she has been in pretrial detention, including being refused treatment for abdominal pain and aching teeth for over nine months. She requires an urgent medical examination and access to the treatment she urgently needs and in accordance with her wishes.

Marfa Rabkova, is being targeted for her legitimate activities as a human rights defender, such as observing demonstrations and documenting evidence of human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment of peaceful protesters by law enforcement officials. Marfa Rabkova has committed no crime and should be released immediately and unconditionally.

I urge you to take all the necessary steps to ensure that:

- **Marfa Rabkova is released immediately and all charges against her are dropped;**
- **Pending her release, she is urgently provided with adequate medical care in accordance with her wishes and is treated in accordance with international human rights standards, in particular the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The detention of human rights defender Marfa Rabkova and other activists came in the context of a drastic deterioration in the human rights situation in Belarus. During the electoral campaign period and following the presidential election on 9 August 2020, there were mass peaceful protests against the widely disputed official results as well as against police violence and widespread human rights violations. Throughout, the authorities engaged in an escalating campaign against the opposition and all dissenting voices. Thousands of people were arbitrarily arrested by police, an overwhelming majority of them peaceful protesters or bystanders, and many apprehended in abduction-style arrests by masked plain-clothed men.

Marfa Rabkova, a member of the Human Rights Center "Viasna" where she coordinates the organization's Volunteer Service, and her husband, Vadzim Zharomski, were detained on the evening of 17 September 2020 by officers of the Interior Ministry's Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption (GUBAZIK). Their apartment was searched and money, personal belongings and IT equipment were seized. Vadzim Zharomski was later released but Marfa Rabkova was remanded and held in pre-trial detention. She was indicted for "training or other preparation of persons for participation in mass riots, or financing of this activity" (Part 3 of Art. 293 of the Criminal code), "participation in a criminal organization in any other form" (Part 2 of Art. 285 of the Criminal Code) and "incitement to hatred" (Art. 130 of the Criminal Code).

On 11 February 2021 Marfa Rabkova faced new criminal charges of "inciting social hostility to the government by a group of unidentified individuals" (Part 3 of Art. 130 of the Criminal Code) and "involvement in a criminal organization" (Part 2 of Art. 285 of the Criminal Code). If found guilty, Marfa Rabkova may be imprisoned for up to 12 years. In late November 2021 she was charged with additional counts, bringing it to a total of 11 and she is now facing up to 20 years in prison.

While being in pretrial detention Marfa Rabkova's health has deteriorated significantly due to lack of medical care and it is now extremely concerning – she requires immediate examination and treatment. According to her family, she has not been allowed to treat her aching teeth for over nine months, and a part of her front tooth chipped off. After contracting COVID-19 her lymph nodes became inflamed and she had pain in the lower abdomen for several months.

According to the Human Rights Center "Viasna", throughout the presidential election campaign, during and after the 9 August election, 2020 members of Viasna faced harassment from the authorities, including administrative arrest, arbitrary detentions and attempted prosecution in connection with their human rights activities.

Seven Viasna members are currently in prison: chairperson Ales Bialiatski, deputy chairperson Valiantsin Stefanovich, lawyer Uladzimir Labkovich, Marfa Rabkova, head of Viasna's office in Homiel Leanid Sudalenka, volunteers Tatsiana Lasitsa and Andrei Chapiuk. On 3 November 2021 the court sentenced the head of Viasna's Homiel office Leanid Sudalenka and Viasna's volunteer Tatsiana Lasitsa to three and two and a half years in prison, respectively.

On 17 September 2021 dozens of Belarusian and international human rights organizations including Amnesty International, launched a campaign of solidarity with the imprisoned human rights activists of Viasna, #FreeViasna.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian, Russian, English or your own language.
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 24 April 2022
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Marfa Rabkova (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/5000/2021/en/>