

The information is aggregated from open source online resources and our own practice. In these newsletters, we will update you in brief on everyday human rights violations in numbers and facts.

Summary: Tuesday 1 December to Monday 7 December 2020

The authorities in Belarus continue putting pressure on activists, journalists, human rights defenders, medical workers, students, and virtually anyone who dares to openly show that they stand for freedom of assembly and free media and against violence, police brutality, and rigged election results.

Peaceful protest rallies for the fifth month (120 days) continued in Belarus. Protesters were detained on Sunday 6 December during peaceful protests, with law enforcement using disproportionate force. Reportedly, 324 people were detained, most of them in Minsk, Hrodna, Smaliavichy, Lahoisk, and Navapolack.¹ Two BelaPan journalists were detained in Hrodna, Marysia Harevich and Siarhiei Liudkievich (now released).

There are 159 people on the list of political prisoners in Belarus as of 7 December 2020. This week Belarusian human rights organisations added 16 more people to the list.^{2 3}

People are being detained and face arrests or fines for protesting, posting on social media,⁴ or even decorating their windows with white-red-white colours.⁵ Relatives of those in detention face difficulties when they try to find out their whereabouts.⁶ Even after trial, the arrested are moved to numerous locations, usually on the day when relatives are allowed to bring them some warm clothes or food. It means that relatives spend all day in queues just to find out that the arrest location has changed.

Another intimidation method, carried out by the state system of education and childcare authorities, is to blackmail activists and say that their children will be taken away.⁷ People who

¹ See Viasna: <https://spring96.org/be/news/100805>

² See Viasna: <http://spring96.org/en/news/100789>

³ See Viasna: <https://spring96.org/en/news/100729>

⁴ Viachaslau Barok, a priest from Rasony, was sentenced to 10 days in jail for re-posting a poster by well-known Belarusian designer Uladzimir Tsesler. The poster compared the regime in Belarus with the Nazis. The priest was accused of promoting Nazi symbols. See TUT.by: <https://news.tut.by/society/710112.html?tg>

⁵ Having a flag inside apartments and making it visible outside is now treated as a mass event (a picket). Several cases of people being arrested for having a white-red-white flag at home are examined in this TUT.by article: <https://news.tut.by/society/709847.html>

⁶ For example: <https://news.tut.by/society/710041.html?tg>

⁷ Head of the Children's Hospice in Hrodna, Volha Vialichka, had to leave Belarus as she was threatened by childcare authorities with having her children taken to an orphanage. See RFE: <https://www.svaboda.org/a/30978493.html>

are active and publicly express their point of view lose their jobs in state-controlled enterprises, lose their jobs,⁸ or even face criminal charges for illegal strikes.⁹

Journalists and freedom of press

One of the largest independent media outlets, TUT.by portal, has been deprived of mass media status.¹⁰ Since August, 373 journalists have been arrested, six of whom are currently detained.¹¹

Twenty workers of the newspaper Nasha Niva have been summoned to the Investigative Committee as witnesses in the libel case against the now former Deputy Interior Minister Alyaksandr Barsukou.¹²

On 4 December, Peter Stano, Spokesman for the European External Action Service, called on the Belarusian authorities to release all imprisoned Belarusian journalists and re-establish popular portal TUT.by's status as a media outlet.¹³

Sexual and gender based violence towards protesters and detainees

The Belarusian authorities deny any cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) by police, and no single criminal case has been initiated.

Dozens of cases of SGBV of detainees by law enforcement officers have been reported in the media and documented by human rights organisations. The majority of survivors do not disclose their names and identities. Human Rights Watch reported the case of the rape of a 30-year-old man who was detained in Minsk on 11 August 2020.¹⁴ Another case of rape of a women was reported by the Swedish media.¹⁵

Hundreds of cases of threats of rape and other forms of sexual violence have been documented during the four months since the protests began. The threats vary by their intensity: some amount to attempted sexual violence, others to swearing and insults.¹⁶

⁸ For instance, Olga Britikova, who was head of the sales department in Naftan was fired, see TUT.by: <https://finance.tut.by/news710099.html?tg>; top athletes from the Belarusian national team were dropped, RFE: <https://www.svaboda.org/a/30980276.html>

⁹ A case from the Belarusian Steel Plant, RFE: <https://www.svaboda.org/a/30982094.html>

¹⁰ See Belta: <https://eng.belta.by/society/view/tutby-deprived-of-mass-media-status-135547-2020/>

¹¹ <https://www.rferl.org/a/detentions-made-across-belarus-at-anti-lukashenka-marches/30986524.html>

¹² <https://belsat.eu/en/news/all-nasha-niva-staff-summoned-for-interrogation/>

¹³ <https://belsat.eu/en/news/eu-urges-belarusian-authorities-to-release-imprisoned-journalists/>

¹⁴ HRW, Belarus: 'Systematic beatings, torture of protesters', September 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/ru/news/2020/09/14/376373>

¹⁵ ETC, 'Lukashenko's soldiers raped Kristina with their batons', November 2020, <https://www.etc.se/ledare/lukasjenkos-soldater-valdtog-kristina-med-sina-batonger>

¹⁶ ADC Memorial, FIDH report: 'Sexual and gender based violence toward the protesters and detainees in Belarus'.

On 12 September, a 21-year-old student was brutally detained in Minsk. He detailed the attempted sexual violence he suffered in the police vehicle as well as the threats to his reproductive health that he endured.¹⁷

In November, activist Mikalay Dziadok was detained, and the next day a video of his confessions was shared by the prosecution office. After meeting him, his lawyer stated that he was severely tortured and threatened with murder and group rape to get confessions.¹⁸

The right to defence and situation with lawyers

Authorities are hindering defence attorney access to clients detained on political charges, and privacy of communication and correspondence is violated.

Defence attorneys are systematically refused access to clients detained on administrative charges.

Defence attorneys are not admitted to the hearings that take place in pretrial detentions. Failure to inform defence attorneys about the location of their client's detention, the time and the place of the administrative hearing, as well as the anonymity of witnesses, mostly police officers, are common.

COVID-19 and Human rights

Belarusian health professionals have registered 143,383 people infected with the novel coronavirus since late February; 1,190 COVID-19 patients have died. On 4 December, 1,774 new cases were confirmed.

The Ministry of Health reports that starting 4 December, state-run medical centres in Minsk will suspend provision of planned medical aid due to the epidemiological situation.

To follow the COVID-19 situation in Belarus, we advise you to visit <https://covidmonitor.by>

Other news

Speaking at a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council, High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet shared reports of more than 27,000 arrests since 9 August, when protesters began contesting the result of presidential elections. The High Commissioner noted that the penalties imposed on protesters appear to be growing more severe. She observed that in recent weeks “increasing numbers of demonstrators are being charged under various articles of the Criminal Code, which sometimes entail heavy prison sentences”. Ms. Bachelet also expressed her deep concern over the “use of force violations by the security forces”. The High Commissioner expressed concern over reports that at least four people have died in demonstrations;

¹⁷ Viasna, A testimony of a student, who was hospitalised after beatings in the police bus, September 2020: <https://spring96.org/ru/news/99532>

¹⁸ Belsat, Arrested activist Dziadok tear-gassed, threatened with rape, stifled with pillow, November 2020: <https://belsat.eu/en/news/arrested-activist-dzyadok-teargassed-threatened-with-rape-stifled-with-pillow/>

protesters are being randomly chased and kicked; detainees are being beaten by security; and unidentified masked men are dispersing protests, alongside riot police – heightening a climate of fear and impunity. The High Commissioner called on the government to put an end to ongoing human rights violations by, among other things, immediately releasing all those unlawfully detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression; respect the right of peaceful assembly; and ensure independent and transparent investigations into all allegations of torture and other human rights violations.¹⁹

Useful links

The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus drafted a [Second Interim Report on Tortures in Belarus, September-November 2020](#) (in Russian).

Human Rights Center Viasna prepared the report [Human Rights Situation in Belarus: November 2020](#).

Good news

Belarusian pro-democracy activist Ales Bialiatski and the non-governmental organisation Human Rights Center Viasna are joint recipients of the 2020 Right Livelihood Award, widely known as the Alternative Nobel Prize, for their role in fighting for democracy and human rights in Belarus.²⁰

¹⁹ UN, Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, statement: <https://belarus.un.org/en/103727-statement-michelle-bachelet-un-high-commissioner-human-rights-situation-belarus>

²⁰ See the Right Livelihood Foundation: <https://www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/announcement/ales-bialiatski-viasna/l1-pr/>