

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

Saturday 14 October 2023 to Friday 27 October 2023

The human rights crisis in Belarus continues to deepen. The analyzed period was marked by passing another death penalty sentence, as well as the continuation of political persecution – for anti-war actions, protesting in 2020, and online activism. Additionally, one religious organization was disbanded on political grounds.

Another person sentenced to death in Belarus

On 19 October 2023, Minsk Regional Court [sentenced](#) Slutsk resident Alexander Taratuta to death penalty, and his wife Anastasia Taratuta – to 25 years in prison. They were accused of intentionally causing pain and beating a minor, as well as of killing a minor with extreme cruelty under Articles 154 and 139 of the Criminal Code. According to the case materials, the accused inflicted at least nine blows on his three-year-old son, which caused the son's death. The Prosecutor General's Office initiated a criminal case against state officials who did not properly respond to reports on the child's mistreatment.

During one of the court hearings, it [became known](#) that the accused filed an application to initiate criminal proceedings against police officers for the use of physical violence against them. Anastasia's former cellmate reported that employees of the Investigative Committee beat her with a bare electrical wire, demanding her to confess guilt. The cellmate also stated that Anastasia called the police when Alexander started beating their son, but the police decided only to issue Alexander a fine, rather than isolating him from the child.. Also in 2023, Anastasia consulted with social service employees about the divorce, but they insisted on "saving the family."

Mass detentions for the distribution of "extremist materials"

[Systematic "raids"](#) of law enforcement authorities into regional cities and state institutions continue. During such raids, the devices of local residents, who are suspected of "disloyalty to the regime" are examined. As a result, people are detained *en masse* for subscribing to independent resources or distributing information online on charges of "distributing extremist materials" under [Article 19.11 of the Administrative Code](#).

At least 9 of such detentions were documented in the [Gomel region](#). All of the detentions were carried out by the employees of special police units in full combat uniforms, who were armed and used force disproportionately. A video, filmed in Zhitkovichi and published by the security forces, showed how the special forces broke into the apartment, took a man out of his bed, and threw him hard on the floor. Human rights activists also reported mass detentions of workers of the [Novopolotsk Naftan plant](#) right at the entrance of the enterprise.

The security forces continue to use the practice of drawing up protocols in such a way that each instance of "disseminating prohibited information" (via reposts or likes on social media) is qualified as a separate offense, which then allows the courts to punish people with 15-days administrative arrests for a virtually unlimited number of times for the same "offense." On 23 October 2023, [Sergei Valkovich](#), a resident of Orsha, was convicted for "distributing extremist materials" for the fourth time in a row, serving a total of 37 days of administrative arrest. Many cases of persecution related to "extremist materials" reach [the point of absurdity](#) – for instance, a schoolteacher from Slonim [was fined](#) for an "extremist" history textbook that she bought five years ago and recently donated for waste paper recycling.

Cases of persecution related to the war in Ukraine

On 17 October 2023, Brest Regional Court [sentenced](#) programmer Leonid Raychenko to 6 years in prison for donating to Belarusian volunteers fighting in Ukraine on the side of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. He was accused of “recruitment or preparation of persons to take part in an armed conflict on the territory of a foreign state” under Article 361-3 of Criminal Code. According to investigators, in 2022, he donated \$400 to buy bulletproof vests for volunteers, as well as \$150 to the association of Belarusians in Prague, who bought combat uniforms.

On 20 October 2023, the security forces detained Brest resident [Alexander Evtikhov](#) for filming the transportation of military equipment and sending it to a Telegram channel. Charges for such actions were brought under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code (“aiding extremist activities”), with the maximum sanction of 7 years of imprisonment.

Disbandment of religious organizations

On 17 October 2023, [the New Life Church](#) was disbanded by a court decision Allegedly on the grounds of the church having been involved in “extremist activities,” in violation of the law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations”. The church was regularly subjected to pressure from the security forces – its information materials were recognized as “extremist”, the pastor and other workers of the church were detained on “political grounds,” and prayer services were disrupted by law enforcement agencies.

Detention of protesters in 2020 continue

Three years after the protests against the Lukashenka regime in 2020, the security forces continue to detain the protesters. On 18 October 2023, the security forces [reported](#) the detention of two men who distributed flowers at women's marches in 2020, and one girl participating in these marches. The detained Belarusian woman on the [“confession video”](#) said that she participated in almost all Sunday protest marches and was brought to administrative responsibility for “participating in unauthorized mass events.” It is evident that the security forces intend to punish her again for the same actions for which she was punished in the past, this time already in the framework of a criminal, rather than administrative process.

On 20 October 2023, the security forces [detained](#) the director and founder of the dance studio Alexander Dashevsky and Yulia Shostak. The security forces reported that “the protesters gathered and made protest symbols on the studio’s premises” and the detained employees themselves participated in protest marches in 2020.

Political prisoners

The total number of political prisoners in Belarus is [1472](#). The number continues to grow daily. As of 27 October 2023, our colleague [Nasta Lojka](#) has been in custody [for 394 days](#) – on 23 October, she [was transferred](#) to Correctional Colony No. 4 in Gomel.