

URGENT ACTION

TWO PRISONERS AT RISK OF IMMINENT EXECUTION

There is grave concern that the only two known prisoners on death row in Belarus, Aliaksandr Zhylnikau and Viachaslau Sukharko, are at risk of imminent execution.

Aliaksandr Zhylnikau and **Viachaslau Sukharko** were the first two men to be sentenced to death in Belarus in 2018. They are now believed to be the only known men remaining on death row, following the recent executions of Siamion Berazhnoy and Ihar Hershankou. It was, in fact, Aliaksandr Zhylnikau's family who alerted Belarusian civil society to the probable date of the recent executions. Aliaksandr Zhylnikau told his family that until the night of 19 – 20 November, he had been sharing a cell with Siamion Berazhnoy who was taken away and didn't return.

Aliaksandr Zhylnikau and Viachaslau Sukharko were originally sentenced to life imprisonment in March 2017 after being found guilty of the murder of three people in December 2015. In July 2017, following an appeal by the prosecutor, the Supreme Court sent their case back to the lower court for a retrial, which resulted in them being sentenced to death on 20 January 2018. On appeal, Aliaksandr Zhylnikau's lawyer asked for a new forensic examination to be ordered which could prove his innocence in two out of the three murders. The lawyer also asked for a less harsh sentence. Both requests were denied and on 30 May 2018, the Supreme Court upheld Aliaksandr Zhylnikau and Viachaslau Sukharko's death sentences.

Please write immediately in Belarusian, English or your own language:

- Urging the Belarusian authorities to halt the executions of Aliaksandr Zhylnikau and Viachaslau Sukharko;
- To immediately establish an official moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty;
- To commute all death sentences to terms of imprisonment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 25 JANUARY 2019 TO:

Chair of the Parliamentary Working

Group on the Death Penalty

Andrei Naumovich

Ul. Sovetskaya d.8

231291 Lida Belarus

Email: naumovich@house.gov.by

Salutation: Dear Mr Naumovich

Chairman of the Commission on

Clemency for the President of Belarus

Valery Mitskevich

Vul. Karla Marksa 38

220016 Minsk

Belarus

Fax: +375 17 226 06 10 +375 17 222 38

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Email: contact@president.gov.by

Salutation: Dear Mr. Mitskevich

And copies to:

Human Rights Centre Vyasna Vul.

Miarzhynskaha, 8-26, Minsk 220012,

Belarus

Email: viasna@spring96.org

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR SERGEI ALEINIK Embassy of the Republic of Belarus 6 Kensington Court W8 5DL, 020 7937 3288, Fax 020 7361 0005, uk.london@mfa.gov.by, www.uk.mfa.gov.by

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 17/18. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/7797/2018/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

When Aliaksandr Zhylnikau and Viachaslau Sukharko arrived on death row in January this year, there were a total of six men on death row. Today, they are the only two remaining and their families now fear for their fate.

Executions in Belarus are carried out in secrecy. Neither the families, the prisoner nor their legal representative will, it is expected, be informed of the time or date of execution. The former Head of Executions at the prison in Minsk where all death-row prisoners are held, told Amnesty International in an interview that prisoners are told they will be executed only moments before it happens. The prisoners are led to a room, blindfolded, handcuffed and forced to their knees at which point they are shot in the back of the head. The execution may require more than one bullet. In accordance with Belarusian law, which is a legacy of Soviet law in this instance, the body of the prisoner is not returned to the family for burial, nor is the burial site disclosed, which inflicts immeasurable suffering on the families of executed men.

By failing to publish full information about the use of the death penalty, including comprehensive statistics about the number of death sentences imposed and executions carried out, the Belarusian authorities prevent informed public debate about the issue and hamper the movement towards abolition.

Amnesty International supports calls, included in six resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly since 2007, for the establishment of a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty. As of today, 142 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.