

URGENT ACTION

END TORTUROUS ISOLATION OF KALESNIKAVA

Maryia Kalesnikava has been arbitrarily detained for four years for her prominent role in the 2020 election and subsequent peaceful protests in Belarus and held for over 500 days incommunicado. She is denied any external calls, visits, letters, and furthermore, is not allowed to speak with other prisoners. According to confidential sources, Maryia's health has deteriorated gravely and she weighs only 45 kilos. Her treatment, including the denial of medical care she requires, amounts to torture or other ill-treatment and puts her life at risk.

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

Lt.-Gen. Ivan Kubrakou
Minister of the Interior
Vul. Haradski Val 4,
Minsk 220030, Belarus
Fax: +375 17 203 99 18
Email: uzgs@mvd.gov.by

Dear Minister,

I write to demand public information about prisoner of conscience Maryia Kalesnikava, who has been denied contact with the outside world for over a year and whose deteriorating health and safety are of grave concern. I am particularly alarmed that she has been kept incommunicado for over 500 days and that her imprisonment conditions amount to torture and other ill-treatment and are putting her life at risk.

As you will undoubtedly be aware, Maryia Kalesnikava was arrested on 7 September 2020 and later sentenced to 11 years in prison following an unfair trial on false charges of "extremism," "trying to seize power," and "calls for actions causing harm to national security." Since February 2023, she has been denied all contact with the outside world and has been regularly placed in punishment cells (SHIZO, PKT) for prolonged periods of time. For all this time, she has been confined to a tiny, enclosed space, not allowed communication with other prisoners, and only permitted 30 minutes a day in the prison patio. Maryia Kalesnikava suffers from ulcer and other conditions which progress fast in these inhumane conditions and has been denied the medical care she requires. Confidential sources have alerted that she is in extremely poor health and has lost a lot of weight.

Maryia Kalesnikava is a prisoner of conscience that must be immediately and unconditionally released. She has been detained solely in reprisal for her prominent role in challenging the incumbent in disputed 2020 presidential election and in the subsequent peaceful protests.

I urge you to take immediate action to ensure that Maryia Kalesnikava is immediately and unconditionally released. In the meantime, I urge you to ensure that she is no longer held incommunicado or subjected to any form of torture or other ill-treatment, that she is granted access to adequate medical care she requires.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Maryia Kalesnikava is a prominent political activist, protest leader and musician that in 2020 became the symbol of the peaceful protest movement for political change and human rights in Belarus after many political opponents were arbitrarily arrested or arbitrarily disqualified as candidates from the presidential election on 9 August. Together with Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Veranika Tsapkala, Maryia Kalesnikava formed an all-female trio who led an electoral challenge to, and galvanized mass protest vote against, the incumbent Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

Veranika Tsapkala left Belarus on 9 August 2020 for fear of reprisals. Following Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya's forced exile on 10 August 2020, Maryia Kalesnikava emerged as the highest-profile opposition figure in Belarus. She appeared on the frontline of numerous peaceful protests, repeatedly confronted abusive police officers, gave numerous media interviews and continued to support individuals who were arbitrarily detained and tortured in detention.

Maryia Kalesnikava was forcibly disappeared on 7 September 2020. It transpired later that she was abducted by law enforcement officers and taken to the border with Ukraine where she refused to leave Belarus and tore her passport in protest. She was then placed in detention as a criminal suspect together with her close associate Maksim Znak, and later convicted in closed trial of crimes against the state.

Maryia Kalesnikava's condition of detention, including incommunicado detention, prolonged solitary confinement and denial of medical care, are in reprisal for her prominent role in the peaceful protests against the authorities. According to international human rights standards, incommunicado detention where an individual is detained without access to the outside world should be prohibited altogether. Incommunicado detention facilitates torture and other ill-treatment and enforced disappearance. Depending on the circumstances, it can itself constitute torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Also, under international human rights law, prolonged solitary confinement amounts to torture when the individual is confined for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact for a time period in excess of 15 consecutive days.

Maryia Kalesnikava's family last heard from her in February 2023. Since then, she has not been allowed calls, visits or even letters. The authorities have also targeted lawyers who agreed to represent those in detention, including by arbitrarily disbarring three lawyers in retaliation for representing Maryia Kalesnikava: Aliaksandr Pylchenka, Liudmila Kazak, and Uladzimir Pylchenka. Currently, Maryia Kalesnikava has no legal representation.

According to latest scrapes of information from confidential sources, Maryia Kalesnikava is malnourished due to the prison food which is unsuitable for her medical condition, and has lost a lot of weight currently weighing only 45 kilograms. The prison rules only allow her to buy food from the prison shop once every ten days, for a maximum of 40 or 80 rubles (around US\$ 12-25). She has no access to refrigerator.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 November 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: *Maryia Kalesnikava* (She/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/6920/2023/en/>

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

Mr Mikhail Metelsky

Counsellor

Embassy of the Republic of Belarus

6 Kensington Court W8 5DL

020 7937 3288

Fax 020 7938 5985

uk.london@mfa.gov.by

www.uk.mfa.gov.by

Monday-Friday 09.00-13.00 & 14.00-18.00

Salutation: Your Excellency