

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS**

9 April 2021

Senator the Hon. Marise Payne  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
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Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Minister Payne

## **RE: HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS**

The detention, torture, and ill treatment of peaceful protestors in Belarus is a gross violation of human rights that cannot stand unopposed on the global stage. **We ask your government to stand with the people of Belarus as they fight the unlawful crackdown on their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.**

Since Belarus' controversial presidential election in August 2020, tens of thousands of peaceful protestors have been detained, tortured, and some even killed. This surge in police violence, torture and other forms of ill treatment in custody has amassed victims of regime violence on an unprecedented scale across the country. In addition to the brutal reprisals perpetrated by law enforcement officials against peaceful protestors, targets of regime violence have also included political opponents (and their associated staff), journalists, medics, students, union leaders, and bystanders.

The people of Belarus continue to suffer severe violations of their human rights as a direct result of the regime's ongoing sinister crackdown on all forms of dissent, real and imaginary.

Amnesty International has launched an online global solidarity action to call for an end to police violence in Belarus and celebrate the multiple forms of courageous, creative, and peaceful dissent being taken up by Belarusians. Our call for solidarity follows on from the hugely successful global petition against police brutality in Belarus, which included 191,000 signatories from 144 countries. This demand for action cannot remain unanswered.

The regime targets different sectors of Belarusian society in vastly different ways, provoking a richly diverse protest landscape which demands and deserves your attention.

As thousands of individuals gather to claim their rights and have their voices heard, we draw your attention to the broad impacts of the regime's brutal crackdown on peaceful dissent:

- There has been a consistent **use of unlawful force** by police and law enforcement officials against peaceful protesters and bystanders since the 2020 election. The state-sanctioned use of unlawful force has led to the **deaths of several protestors**, whose families are yet to see justice for their loved ones. Rigorous efforts to intimidate and silence victims (and witnesses) of such human rights violations are out-matched only by the pure scale at which these violations have occurred.
- The **inhumane treatment of children** has been core to the Belarusian authorities' increasingly desperate attempts to suppress dissent, as children are threatened with arbitrary arrest and years imprisonment. Weaponising child custody legislation is a particularly insidious strategy used by authorities to threaten and intimidate both children and their parents.
- The clampdown on hundreds of **artists and other cultural figures** protesting the regime has taken the form of arbitrary detention and torture, beatings, criminal charges, and intimidation.
- **Women protestors in Belarus** are subject to an additional dimension of abuse from guards and police officers, testifying to rampant patriarchal attitudes and persecution for representing gender equality issues.
- The **regime's cruel treatment of older people** participating in Belarusian protest movements has been a cause of particular distress across the country. The authorities have targeted older protestors involved in dissent actions, like Wisdom Marches, and detained these citizens under appalling conditions for weeks on end. Reports maintain that the medical needs of detainees suffering illnesses such as cancer, heart and lung conditions have been neglected, and no provisions have been made to protect older detainees from contracting COVID-19.

**We urge you to encourage the Belarusian authorities to put an end to these human rights violations, and immediately release all people detained solely for exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and expression.**

Furthermore, we encourage your government to participate in global, multilateral efforts to address issues of state sponsored impunity and unlawful force, torture, and other ill treatment by members of law enforcement agencies.

For further information, or to discuss and organise a meeting, please contact Joel MacKay at [joel.mackay@amnesty.org.au](mailto:joel.mackay@amnesty.org.au) or 0424 242 112.

Yours sincerely,



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Amnesty International Australia