

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

26 May 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

Thank you for the correspondence sent on your behalf by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Assistant Secretary, Latin America and Eastern Europe on 28 April 2021 in reply to my letter regarding the human rights situation in Belarus. I also acknowledge and thank you for the work that Australian government has done to bring international attention to Belarus, in particular, by raising its concerns at the 44th, 45th and 46th sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

I am again writing to you about the worsening human rights situation, which has been exemplified by the recent arrest of journalist, Raman Pratasevich. I also enclose [Amnesty International's new publication](#) that outlines the brutal reprisals against students, revealing the disruptive impact of the state's repression of academic life in Belarus.

Raman Pratasevich

Amnesty International welcomes your strong condemnation of the Belarusian Government's forced military interception of a commercial flight, and subsequent arrest of Belarusian opposition blogger and passenger, Raman Pratasevich. We agree with your call for Belarus to immediately release Protasevich and a full investigation, and also call for him to be able to travel to the country of his choosing.

Amnesty International is concerned that Pratasevich is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Now Belarusian state media have released video footage - in which he has visible bruises on his face - showing Raman "confessing" to nothing more than having been involved with the organization of protests, and we are concerned that this "confession" may have been obtained under duress

University students expelled from universities and imprisoned for peaceful protest

Belarusian students are being arrested on criminal charges, prosecuted for peaceful activism and expelled from educational institutions, in retribution for their involvement in the continuing protest

movement against the widely-contested official presidential election results of August 2020, Amnesty International said today.

The enclosed briefing contains case studies that show the extent of this brutal crackdown.

As of 17 May 2021, according to the Belarusian Students' Association, an independent student union, at least 466 students have been detained, almost a third of whom are women. Many were put under administrative detention or fined an average of 120 Euros, a quarter of the average monthly salary in Belarus. At least 153 students have been arbitrarily expelled from universities and many have fled to neighbouring countries fearful for their safety. Forty-two students have become suspects in criminal cases and six have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

In one of the most brazen attacks on student organizations, the authorities launched a criminal investigation against 11 student activists and one teacher, many of whom were apprehended at their homes on 12 November 2020, a date which has since become known as "Black Thursday." Their trial started on 14 May and is expected to continue until mid-June. All are facing charges under Article 342 of the Criminal Code of Belarus ("organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order") which carries a prison sentence of up to two years.

The targeting of politically active students and teachers is not a new tactic of the Belarusian authorities or educational establishments. However, as with all those currently speaking out against the government in the context of the presidential election, the scale of harassment, persecution and violence against them is unprecedented in Belarus' post-independence history.

Amnesty International calls on the Belarusian authorities to immediately end the repression against students, academics and all peaceful protesters, and asks the Australian government to include this in its ongoing advocacy in regards to the human rights situation in Belarus.

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

Yours sincerely,



Sam Klintworth
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Amnesty International Australia