

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS**

18 June 2021

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

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Dear Minister Payne

**RE: MEDICAL WORKERS IN BELARUS FACING BRUTAL REPRISALS FOR PEACEFUL PROTEST**

I am again writing to you regarding the worsening human rights situation in Belarus. I attach our latest briefing, *Belarus: Crackdown on medics, "Do you want one of your children to disappear?."*

The wide scale government crackdown on dissent in Belarus has been escalating in recent weeks, and is now also targeting the medical community. Despite chronic staff shortages in hospitals, dozens of health workers have been dismissed and/or barred from medical employment, while still more have faced threats or prosecution.

These dismissals, threats, and legal actions have been in response to health workers participating in anti-government demonstrations or speaking out against official accounts of protester deaths or injuries. As first-hand witnesses of the bloodshed perpetrated by the government crackdown in Belarus, the testimonies of the medical community provide valuable insights into the reality on the ground.

Silencing these voices, and those raised in protest, not only threatens the rights to freedom of expression and protest, but also endangers the Belarusian health care system amid a global pandemic.

We have worked with health workers in Belarus, who have told us of the horrors and brutality they have witnessed inflicted by security forces on peaceful protesters. This brutality has prompted many to join in protest themselves, wearing white robes and treating those who are injured along the way. Several reported being arrested during such peaceful demonstrations, resulting in extended periods of detention and inhumane treatment by police and prison guards. Others who have participated report on their loved ones being threatened, or themselves being dismissed from their position and barred from future work in the medical community.

Medical workers not involved in the protests directly face similar consequences merely for refusing to downplay the brutality of the authorities' suppression tactics. After peaceful protester Raman

Bandarenka died in hospital from injuries incurred in police custody, officials claimed the injuries resulted from a drunken street fight. When the anesthesiologist who treated him contradicted this account to a journalist, both were convicted of “disclosing medical secrets,” were fined, and sentenced to serve time.

**The international community must not let this gross violation of human rights stand. We urge the Australian government to speak up against the escalating crackdown on human rights in Belarus.**

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SKlintworth', written in a cursive style.

Sam Klintworth  
National Director  
Amnesty International Australia