

URGENT ACTION

STOP ILL-TREATMENT OF JAILED OPPOSITION LEADER

Belarusian authorities should immediately and unconditionally release and end the ill-treatment of Maryia Kalesnikava. She is a prominent opposition figure and symbol of the 2020 peaceful protest and has been held behind bars since September 2020. Maryia Kalesnikava has been ill-treated by the penal colony administration and her health has deteriorated. She has been denied any communication with her family and lawyers since mid-February, including calls, letters, or visits.

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

Andrei Shved
Prosecutor General of the Republic of Belarus
Internatsiyanalnaya str., 22,
Minsk, 220030
Republic of Belarus
Email: info@prokuratura.gov.by

Dear Prosecutor General,

I am deeply concerned about the health and safety of the prisoner of conscience **Maryia Kalesnikava** and demand her immediate and unconditional release.

Following her abduction-style arrest on 7 September 2020, on 6 September 2021 Maryia Kalesnikava was sentenced to 11 years in prison on false charges of "extremism," "trying to seize power," and "calls for actions causing harm to the national security." Maryia Kalesnikava is serving her sentence in female penal colony N4 in Homiel, where her health has significantly deteriorated. She has been repeatedly targeted by the prison administration for alleged disciplinary infringements.

On the night of 28 November 2022, Maryia Kalesnikava was admitted to the intensive care unit of Homiel's emergency hospital where she underwent surgery for a perforated ulcer. The prison administration forced her to resume her work at the colony's clothing factory before she was able to properly recover after the surgery. Immediately prior to being admitted to the hospital, Maryia Kalesnikava had spent over 10 days in a freezing punishment isolation cell despite having serious health concerns. Her cell was so cold that she could not sleep at all, so she walked constantly to keep warm. Although Maryia Kalesnikava fainted repeatedly and suffered from high blood pressure and nausea while in solitary confinement, the authorities refused to transfer her to the hospital until her health significantly deteriorated. The penal colony's administration did not inform her lawyer or family that she had been hospitalized and undergone surgery, even though she had repeatedly asked the hospital staff to get in touch with her family. In May 2023, her health deteriorated further.

Since mid-February, Maryia Kalesnikava has been denied any communication with her family (including calls, letters, or visits) while her lawyer has been unlawfully refused access to her since 7 February, despite repeated attempts to contact her.

I urge you to:

- **Ensure Maryia Kalesnikava's immediate and unconditional release;**
- **Urgently end the ill-treatment and incommunicado detention of Maryia Kalesnikava, provide her with adequate health care and all essentials including medicines;**
- **Promptly and effectively investigate the allegations of Maryia Kalesnikava's ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and unfounded prosecution, and bring all those responsible to account, in fair trial proceedings**
- **End the misuse of the criminal justice system to target activists and peaceful dissent.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Maryia Kalesnikava is a prominent opposition figure, musician, and symbol of the peaceful protest movement for human rights in Belarus. She became one of the leaders of the opposition after Viktor Babaryka and along with another presidential hopeful, Siarhei Tsikhanousky, was arrested in the run-up to the presidential election on 9 August 2020. 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 persecution. 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 street protests, repeatedly confronted abusive police officers, gave numerous media interviews and continued to support individuals who had suffered arbitrary arrest and torture and other ill-treatment in detention.

From October 2020 to December 2022, Belarusian authorities disbarred three lawyers in retaliation for representing Kalesnikova: Aliaksandr Pylchenka, Liudmila Kazak, and Uladzimir Pylchenka.

Following her emergency surgery in November 2022, Maryia Kalesnikava spent approximately a week at the Homiel emergency hospital before being transferred to the penal colony's medical facility. The details about her condition and account of ill-treatment in the punishment cell only became known on 5 December 2022, when her father was allowed to visit her.

On 10 January 2023, the penal colony's administration forced Maryia Kalesnikava to resume work at the colony's clothing factory. Her family expressed concern that she was still too weak from the surgery to start working again.

In late March 2023, Viasna, a prominent human rights organization, reported that Maryia Kalesnikava had been placed in a punishment cell ("PKT") over a supposed violation of penitentiary regulations.

In May 2023, human rights organizations learned through private channels that Maryia Kalesnikava's health had significantly deteriorated in prison and that she had not recovered from the surgery. According to credible reports, she was unable to do mandatory work in prison and had lost consciousness on several occasions. Concerned about her deteriorating health, her family consulted with a doctor regarding her post-operative care needs. Although the doctor was not able to examine her in person, he advised that she might require medical supervision and a special diet for several more months following the surgery to avoid a relapse with potentially far worse health consequences.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian, Russian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 22 August 2023

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/eur49/3106/2020/en/>