

Belarus: crack down on young protesters

Belarus has marked the week it comes before the UN Committee against Torture as part of its four-yearly periodic review by imprisoning young people for speaking out. Police officers reportedly used considerable force to arrest around 100 young protestors during yesterday evening's unsanctioned pro-democracy demonstrations both in the capital, Minsk, and in towns in the regions.

"In the week that Belarus will appear before the Committee against Torture in Geneva it is inconceivable that the Belarusian authorities should tarnish their already poor human rights record by putting the young people behind bars for demonstrating peacefully," Amnesty International stated.

The demonstration in Minsk was organized by the youth wing of one of Belarus' mainstream pro-democracy parties, the Belarusian Popular Front, in order to vent their anger at Belarus' questionable democratic credentials.

Amnesty International considers the young detainees, who were arrested for peacefully exercising their right to assembly, as prisoners of conscience. Around 50 youngsters are expected to stand trial today and tomorrow and face up to 15 days' administrative imprisonment.

The organization has also received reports that some of the demonstrators were reportedly punched and kicked by police officers and repeatedly hit with truncheons as they were forced into police vehicles.

"Belarus must learn that using such shameful degrees of force to herd youngsters, many of whom were minors, onto police buses and into

police vans does nothing to improve Belarus' sullied image in the international arena. Such ugly displays are totally at odds with the country's international human rights obligations", Amnesty International continued.

*A representative from Amnesty International will be in Geneva on Wednesday and Thursday this week to speak with members of the Committee against Torture. The organization has also submitted a report, *Belarus: Briefing for the UN Committee against Torture*, to the Committee. The report highlights the overall egregious human rights situation in Belarus, expressing concern about the possible "disappearances" of opposition figures and the intimidation of their family members, frequent police ill-treatment of detainees, harassment of human rights defenders and opposition figures, arbitrary detention of peaceful demonstrators, the frequent use of the death penalty and appalling conditions in Belarus' prisons and detention centres.*

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