

# MASS TORTURE IN BELARUS 2020

**Second interim report:  
detention, conditions of detention  
and treatment of detainees  
in September - November 2020**

INTERNATIONAL  
COMMITTEE  
FOR THE INVESTIGATION  
OF TORTURE IN BELARUS

**The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus was created as a reaction of Belarusian and foreign human rights organizations to torture and brutality towards civilians after the presidential elections on August 9, 2020.**

### **The Committee's objectives**

1. Documenting torture, brutality, use of weapons and special equipment against civilians.
2. Searching for witnesses and evidence of torture.
3. Identification of suspects in torture and inhuman treatment.
4. Processing of the information received.
5. Preparation of lawsuits and legal support of torture victims.
6. Communications with and appeals to international organizations.
7. Preparation of reports on the collected information for the general public of Belarus, as well as for international organizations and institutions.
8. Interaction with governmental, non-governmental actors, for example, national and international courts, the Investigative Committee, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Belarus.

### **Principles of the Committee**

The activities of the Committee are based on the [Principles of Activity of Human Rights Defenders of Belarus](#). In addition, for this purpose, we adhere to and emphasize the following in our work:

- confidentiality of information and security for its members;
- interaction of all stakeholders;
- work according to unified methodology and concentration of information in a single database.

## **The Committee's members include**

1. "Legal Initiative"
2. Human Constanta
3. Center for the Promotion of Women's Rights "Her Rights"
4. Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union
5. Public Association "Zvyano"
6. Belarusian Documentation Center
7. Human Rights Center "Legal Assistance to the Population"
8. Public organization Thruth Hounds
9. Charitable foundation East-SOS
10. Association of Ukrainian Human Rights Monitors on Law Enforcement
11. Human Rights Center ZMINA (Ukraine)
12. World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)
13. Moscow Helsinki Group

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## General conclusions

This report briefly describes the situation with torture and inhuman treatment in relation to detained citizens from September to November 2020.

The main trends in the treatment of detainees and prisoners that were documented in August 2020 have not changed. After an initial decline in militiaviolence at the end of August, torture of detainees intensified in September and has continued over the next three months. The tragic culmination of this violence was the death of a 31-year-old resident of Minsk, Roman Bondarenko, through the fault of law enforcement officers on November 12, 2020. He was beaten so badly during his arrest by unknown persons and during the subsequent stay in the militia department that he died in intensive care the next day from his injuries.

A characteristic trend in this period was the purposeful concealment by law enforcement officials of their identity. While on duty, they do not use uniforms with identification information and insignia, some are dressed in civilian clothes, do not introduce themselves and do not provide their documents. Faces are almost always covered with masks. Civilian vehicles without registration plates are often used.

Detentions, as before, are carried out as abductions — militia officers do not allow detainees to call their relatives to inform them of their whereabouts. In addition, they do not notify relatives of the detention of people, despite appropriate requests, and sometimes provide false information.

Another alarming trend is the deliberate creation of inhumane conditions of detention in places of detention in order to punish detainees. State bodies deliberately do not take any measures to protect detainees from contracting coronavirus infection and to isolate and treat those who have symptoms of the disease. In such conditions — mass arrests and lack of preventive measures — places of detention have become places of mass infection with COVID-19.

The Committee, represented by Belarusian human rights organizations, from September to November sent 11 applications to initiate criminal cases on the facts of violence, torture and the use of weapons and explosive

ammunition during peaceful meetings. As of 01.12.2020, the Committee is not aware of the initiation of at least one criminal case. At the same time, subdivisions of the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus are actively initiating cases against the victims allegedly for “participation in mass riots” and conducting preliminary investigations. The state fails to fulfill its international obligations to protect its citizens from torture and inhuman treatment and to conduct prompt and impartial investigations into such cases.

## Introduction and methodology

The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus continues to record torture and inhuman treatment at all stages of interaction with law enforcement officials — during detention, in law enforcement vehicles, in law enforcement departments and places of serving sentences.

In September–November 2020, the practice of using violence against citizens who participated in peaceful protests in Minsk and other cities of Belarus and/or expressed their opinion in another way continued in the Republic of Belarus. **During this period, during and after 13 peaceful rallies, at least 9500 of their participants were detained. The detainees included bystanders and journalists during the performance of their professional duties.**

The most numerous marches in the period under review took place on Sundays. During almost all of them, law enforcement officers beat people, including with truncheons, used pepper gas and firearms with rubber bullets.

There are known cases of violence against detainees during their transfer to militia departments, as well as during transportation to other places of detention. As a rule, they were beaten by riot militia officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. The victims note the facts of psychological and physical violence in the militia department, in particular, when people are forced to stand in an uncomfortable position for many hours at low temperatures outside or indoors.

In a number of cases, medical assistance was not timely provided to the detainees. It is known that some detainees were refused it at all, despite visible bodily injuries or the presence of serious illnesses.

The conditions of detention in the IVS, CIP, IVS Zhodino, SIZO Baranovichi do not comply with national legislation and international standards. Staying in such conditions is in itself ill-treatment and torture. In addition, adequate anti-epidemiological measures are not being taken, as a result of which many detainees are exposed to COVID-19 infection during their stay.

This report provides detailed information on the disproportionate use of force during detention, in the transport of law enforcement agencies, in internal affairs departments and in places of detention.

The report was prepared on the basis of in-depth interviews conducted by the Committee with victims of torture and inhuman treatment, as well as information from open sources, data obtained from partners, witnesses of human rights violations, as well as during the monitoring of peaceful assemblies.



## Disproportionate use of force during detention

The main method of suppressing peaceful protests of citizens in September–November 2020 was the use of force to disperse and detain protesters, followed by bringing them to either criminal (Articles 293, 342 of the Criminal Code) or administrative (Article 23.34 of the Administrative Code) liability.

During this period, thousands of peaceful citizens' assemblies in the country were held mainly on Sundays, and the most massive ones were in Minsk.

Here is the chronology of violence, reflecting the number of detained citizens in the country as a whole and in the city of Minsk (according to the human rights center “Viasna” and the media).

*Table*

Information on the number of people detained at mass events and the use of special equipment (September–November 2020)

Date	Name of the event	Number of detainees	The use of special equipment against citizens
6 September 2020	<b>Unity march</b>	in Minsk, 293 people were detained, in the regions — in Brest, Grodno, Mogilev, Vitebsk, Baranovichi, Pinsk and in other cities 65 people	Military equipment (armored personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles) and special equipment were introduced in Minsk to disperse demonstrators; pepper gas was widely used, there were facts of beatings of people lying on the ground with truncheons
13 September 2020	<b>March of Heroes</b>	376 people were detained in Minsk, 58 people in the regions	For the first time during the protests in Brest, a water cannon was used. In Minsk, during the dispersals, pump-action guns, stun grenades, and shooting into the air to scare people were used
20 September 2020	<b>March of Justice</b>	194 people were detained in Minsk, 77 people were detained in the regions	The authorities used tear gas, stun grenades, water cannons. For the first time, servicemen armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles were seen on the streets of Minsk

End of table

Date	Name of the event	Number of detainees	The use of special equipment against citizens
27 September 2020	<b>People's inauguration</b> — marches in Minsk and in all regional centers, in Orsha, Zhodino, Novopolotsk and other cities	In total, 393 people were detained in the republic	Tear gas and stun grenades were used to suppress the marches
4 October 2020	<b>March of Solidarity with Political Prisoners</b>	252 persons detained	Water cannons were used
11 October 2020	<b>March of pride</b>	617 persons were detained	In several places in Minsk, water cannons were used with the use of colored water, stun grenades, and gas were used
18 October 2020	<b>Partisan march</b>	280 persons detained	The law enforcement armed with machine guns broke into public transport, looking for the protesters who were leaving. Rubber bullets were also used
25 October 2020	<b>March "People's Ultimatum"</b>	314 persons were detained	Law enforcement agencies used rubber bullets and stun grenades against the demonstrators
1 November 2020	<b>March against terror (procession "Dzyady")</b>	314 persons were detained	In relation to people who tried to walk across the field towards the Kurapaty tract, the law enforcement literally staged a safari, shooting at them from jeeps
8 November 2020	<b>March of Democracy</b>	1055 persons were detained in Minsk alone	Water cannons, armored personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles, gas, stun grenades
15 November 2020	<b>Action "I'm going out"</b> in memory of the murdered Roman Bondarenko	1291 persons were detained (almost everyone in Minsk)	The forceful destruction of the people's memorial, stun grenades, pulling the participants of the event out of the shops, raids of law enforcement officers on apartments
22 November 2020	<b>March against fascism</b>	390 persons were detained	Flashbang grenades in different districts of Minsk
29 November 2020	<b>March of neighbors</b>	361 persons detained	The riot militia used gas against citizens in different districts of Minsk, and conducted frightening fire into the air

Participant of the March of Heroes K. was beaten in Minsk under the following circumstances:

On September 13, he, along with other participants of the peaceful assembly, was in the area of Narochanskaya str. when a group of law enforcement officers drove up to them in minibuses. As the witness explained, people started run away in panic, including him. *“However, — the witness further explained, — the law enforcement stopped right in front of me and I had no chance to escape. One officer immediately ran to me, hit me with a gloved fist in the area of my right temple. I lost orientation, and he grabbed my neck with two fingers, tilted me forward, ordered me to look down, folded my arms behind my back and dragged me into this minibus. In front of the minibus, he hit me with his knee in the ribs and threw me into the minibus on the floor, I fell. There was another officer there, they were all in olive-colored uniforms, some with truncheons, some without, in black balaclavas, tall, strong build, I did not notice other markings. The one who, presumably wa the driver of the minibus ordered me to lie down on my knees, rest my head on the floor and fold my arms crosswise behind my neck. I did not resist, did not put up any resistance at all, obeyed. When I got down on my knees, looking at the floor, he struck me at least two blows, presumably with a truncheon, in the area between the right shoulder blade and the spine. I didn’t say anything, I didn’t ask for anything, I just tried to lie as quietly as possible”.*

In Grodno, during a protest on October 4, 2020, law enforcement detained a 13-year-old girl and pepper gas was sprayed into her face. According to the head of the department of information and public relations of the Internal Affairs Directorate of the Grodno Regional Executive Committee E. Dudko, during the detention of her father, the girl *“poured a bottle of cola over the employee of the internal bodies”*. Why did the law enforcement have to use special equipment to detain a minor, there was no comment.<sup>1</sup>

The victim M., a participant in the **March of Pride** on October 11, describing the events of that day, explained the following:

*“... Somewhere around four o’clock my friend and I were moving towards Stella and riot militia were already pushing people back. As a result, people walked towards Timiryazeva Street, everyone walked calmly and a convoy of riot militia followed us. At some point, not reaching two hundred meters from Timiryazeva, riot policemen ran at us. My friend and I were at the end of the column, and they began indiscriminately to simply grab the people closest to*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dw.com/ru/protesty-v-belarusi-aleksievich-opasaetsja-chto-ee-ne-vpustjat-v-stranu/a-55149249>

*them and beat them with truncheons. I got about three or four blows, now it's hard to say, one of which hit the head. The rest — hand and back. 3–4 people were beating people before our very eyes».*

On October 12, 2020, First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Head of the Criminal Militia G. Kazakevich said: *“Employees of the internal affairs bodies and servicemen of the internal troops will not leave the streets and, if necessary, will use special equipment and military weapons”*.<sup>2</sup>

According to the testimony of citizen O., a participant in the **Partisan march**, on October 18 he was detained near the Chervenskiy market, at the intersection of Aranskaya and Mayakovsky streets. While inspecting his personal belongings, a poster with the inscription “Tikhanovskaya is my president” was found. After inspecting the belongings, people without insignia took him into a minibus, where they hit him several times on the head, despite the fact that he did not offer resistance and did not insult them in any way.

On October 25, the **People's Ultimatum march** took place in the country — the most crowded march in September-October, in which more than 200 000 demonstrators took part. Law enforcement agencies used rubber bullets and flash bangs against the demonstrators. As it became known, the order to disperse the procession on Orlovskaya street gave personally Alexander Lukashenko.<sup>3</sup> After the demonstration was dispersed, the law enforcement broke into the apartments of nearby houses and by force pulled out the citizens who had taken refuge there.

On October 30, at a meeting with the staff of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Alexander Lukashenko, referring to the topic of peaceful assemblies, said the following: *“From now on, especially in the apartments of citizens where they hide, we are not capturing anyone. If someone touches a soldier, he must leave at least without hands. I say this publicly so that everyone understands our further determination. From now on — that's it. We have nowhere to retreat, and we are not going to retreat. Who is ready, we will act”*.<sup>4</sup>

According to the doctor of the emergency hospital on November 8, *“Eight patients have injuries of varying severity, which may be associated with detentions.*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.belta.by/society/view/kazakevich-pravoohraniteli-ne-ujdut-s-ulits-i-v-sluchae-neobhodimosti-budut-primenjat-boevoe-oruzhie-410615-2020/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://yandex.by/news/story/Lukashenko\\_prikazal\\_razognat\\_protestuyushhikh\\_v\\_voskresene--61049be1244717024c46260b064043b0?lang=ru&wan=1&stid=KTDLZn-U7p9dX0FgTfol&persistent\\_id=7341](https://yandex.by/news/story/Lukashenko_prikazal_razognat_protestuyushhikh_v_voskresene--61049be1244717024c46260b064043b0?lang=ru&wan=1&stid=KTDLZn-U7p9dX0FgTfol&persistent_id=7341)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.belta.by/president/view/dalshe-vse-nam-otstupat-nekuda-i-my-otstupat-ne-sobiraemsja-lukashenko-predupredil-uchastnikov-413359-2020/>

*Closed craniocerebral trauma, concussion, bruises of the soft tissues of the face are the main ones. There were also fractures of the bones of the hand, fractured ribs”.*<sup>5</sup>

Here is the published information of eyewitnesses about what was happening on November 15 (the action **“I go out”** in memory of the murdered Roman Bondarenko): *“In the house at 1 Smorgovsky tract, which is located next to the «Ploshchad Peremen», law enforcement officials are searching apartments. On the 16th floor, they cut the door... They go from top to bottom, enter the apartments, check the passports of the tenants and the presence of strangers in the apartment. In neighboring houses, they also walk along the entrances. From the house at 62 Chervyakova, located opposite, people are taken out with bags — ready for serving the arrests”.*<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned Sunday marches in Minsk, which were attended by dozens, and on some days hundreds of thousands of citizens, **Women’s Marches** were held on Saturdays, on Mondays — **Marches of pensioners**, on Thursdays — **Marches of people with disabilities**. Students and university professors and medical workers also expressed their public peaceful protest against the lawlessness of the authorities.

The facts of the use of special equipment against medical workers, students and pensioners were noted.

**In total, according to data posted in open sources, as of November 22, more than 30 300 people were detained for participating in protest actions in the republic, and often these detentions were accompanied by unjustified use of violence.**

**In the overwhelming majority of cases, the detention of citizens during peaceful assemblies was carried out by law enforcement officers in balaclavas without identification marks in black uniforms (riot police, cadets of the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and officers of various militia departments), in camouflage uniforms — soldiers of the Interior Ministry troops , in civilian clothes and balaclavas (employees of GUBOPiK and Special operation forces of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus), and sometimes in olive (presumably the Almaz or KGB Alfa group of the Interior Ministry) uniform.**

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<sup>5</sup> [https://health.tut.by/news/medical\\_news/707296.html?](https://health.tut.by/news/medical_news/707296.html?)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dw.com/ru/belarus-v-londone-unichtozhen-memorial-pogibshimv-belarusi-aktivistam/a-55603791>

During the arrests, a large number of citizens received bodily injuries of varying severity.

We do not have systematized information about the number of injured people and the nature of the injuries they received.

However, according to data published by the Mediazona portal, during the protests in August-September 2020 alone, at least 1373 people (1316 men and 57 women) were injured by the actions of law enforcement officers in Minsk, about 500 people were beaten during the rallies, every third was injured of moderate severity and mutilation.<sup>7</sup> In presenting its data, Mediazona refers to sources in the Investigative Committee and other law enforcement structures of Belarus.

We believe that by now the number of citizens who have received injuries from representatives of law enforcement agencies has increased significantly. Most of the victims of violence at peaceful gatherings are young men. The average age of the wounded is 31 years. The most serious injuries are from special equipment: rubber bullets and stun grenades.

From the **injuries from rubber bullets** (40 cases), it is clear that during the suppression of the protests, the law enforcement aimed at the head, chest and stomach; such shots inflicted the most serious injuries.

According to the same source, another participant in the rally, a 37-year-old man, was shot through the chest on the right and damaged his lung, in connection with which he was in a coma for three days. A 24-year-old protester was shot in the stomach what damaged his small intestine.

When hit in the head, rubber bullets led to craniocerebral injuries and fractures of the bones of the face. For example, a 40-year-old protester, after he was shot, got into hospital with diagnoses of “closed craniocerebral trauma, concussion, multiple gunshot wounds in the lower jaw on the right”. He also suffered injuries to his chest, abdomen and left thigh. For a 29-year-old protester, a rubber bullet punctured the maxillary sinus and fractured the nose with displacement of bone fragments. Another victim was shot in the eye: he received a severe concussion.

**Flashbangs mutilated** protesters en masse. When they hit the crowd, the grenades exploded at the level of the hips and below, but lacerated wounds from shrapnel remained throughout the body, and the blast wave led to concussions and head injuries. Such explosions left no less serious injuries than rubber bullets.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://mediazona.by/article/2020/10/13/minsk-beaten>



One of the victims, a 30-year-old man, had his right foot torn off by the explosion. Two other protesters sustained a comminuted fracture of a toe on their left hand and a comminuted fracture of the left foot and fibula with displaced fragments. A 33-year-old man was diagnosed with a fracture of the transverse process of the lumbar vertebra after a grenade explosion.<sup>8</sup>

On October 25, in Minsk, on Orlovskaya Street, the law enforcement used special equipment, including stun grenades, against protesters in Minsk. Citizens say about wounds in the leg with grenade shrapnel, in the back — with rubber bullets that day, as well as beatings with truncheons on the head.<sup>9</sup>

Doctors report that since during hospitalization, the data of patients who were brought by the ambulance to the hospital with injuries are automatically transferred to the law enforcement agencies, some people refuse hospitalization or do not go to clinics at all.<sup>10</sup>

Due to the severity of the wounds, most of the victims of special equipment were admitted to hospitals from the street, bypassing the militia department and isolation wards. The most severe patients were sent to the military hospital, the less injured were distributed between city hospitals and an emergency hospital.<sup>11</sup>

In the evening of November 11, in the courtyard of his house on the street Chervyakova in Minsk (“Ploshchad Peremen”), presumably by people belonging to Alyaksandr Lukashenka’s inner circle, and by law enforcement officers, 31-year-old Roman Bondarenko was detained and taken to the Tsentralny district militia department of Minsk. On the night of November 12, Roman Bondarenko from the militia department in a coma was admitted to the emergency hospital, where he died without regaining consciousness.

Cause of death: severe closed craniocerebral trauma, acute subdural hematomas over both hemispheres of the brain, cerebral hemorrhage, soft tissue injuries.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://mediazona.by/article/2020/10/13/minsk-beaten>

<sup>9</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/705410.html>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/705410.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=262264&lang=ru>

# **Torture and cruel inhuman treatment in special vehicles of law enforcement**

## **DELIVERY OF DETAINEES TO MILITIA DEPARTMENTS**

There were beatings in special vehicles after the detention and before the people were taken to the militia departments. The beatings were carried out by officers of the Riot Police (OMON). The level of violence and the severity of injuries varied depending on the specific group of OMON officers. The presumable reason is the mood of the riot police.

For example, on October 12, riot militia officers beat detainees in the Kamennaya Gorka area in a minibus, and kicked them in the face for having a white–red–white flag.

Many of the detainees were demanded to show and unblock their phones; they were beaten for insubordination.

So, on September 27, at Independence Avenue, in a minibus, officers in black uniforms and balaclavas, presumably OMON officers, beat the detainee until he lost consciousness, beat him in the groin for refusing to provide the phone password. Medical assistance was not provided to him, he regained consciousness only at the militia department.

There are cases of beatings during transfers from one special vehicle to another special vehicle (paddy wagon). The detainees were beaten on the legs with truncheons, urging them on.

Some of the detainees had their hands fixed behind their backs with plastic construction cable ties, while the hands were squeezed very hard. Despite the moans of the detained people, the ties were not loosened. As a result, the hands quickly became numb, turned blue and sensitivity did not return for a long time. Some of the detainees — “active participants or organizers”, according to the OMON, were marked with red paint (forehead or the outer side of the palm). This



mark means that attitude to such people will be much tougher on the part of the law enforcement than towards the rest. Some were tagged only for speaking in Belarusian.<sup>13</sup>

When transporting people in minibuses, they were put on their knees on the floor and required to lower their heads to the seats or face down on the floor. In paddy wagons, detainees were either kneeled on the floor, or several people were locked up in special sections (“glasses”) designed for one person: 5–6 people were kept in sections of approximately 1.5 m<sup>2</sup> each, in sections of 1 m<sup>2</sup> — 3–4 people. There was not enough oxygen in these departments, people were suffocating. During the COVID-19 pandemic, such actions pose a threat to the health and lives of detainees.

During the transportation, some riot police officers behaved aggressively, swore obscene language towards the detainees, and threatened. In some paddy wagons, white–red–white flags were spread at the entrance, and the detainees were forced to step on them. This is part of the humiliation of protesters who respect their symbols.

All requests of the detainees for medical assistance were ignored, even if the injuries threatened the health and life of the detainees, people were taken only to the militia departments.

### **TRANSPORTATION OF DETAINEES TO OTHER PLACES OF DETENTION (TRANSFER)**

Arrested and detained persons are transported to other places of detention in two types of paddy wagons: with compartments of 1–1.5 m<sup>2</sup> (“glasses”) and without compartments with benches on the sides. The overwhelming majority of the respondents said that these “glasses” were packed with people and they did not have enough oxygen, some literally fainted. In November, when it became cold, when people were being transported in stuffy paddy wagons, when they were literally all wet due to the lack of oxygen, riot militia officers opened the door of the paddy wagon — and people froze.

It is known about cases when a paddy wagon, driving away from the militia department, stopped nearby, and riot militia officers beat the detainees inside.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.the-village.me/village/city/whatsgoingon/285925-metki>

So, on October 11, a paddy wagon, having driven a little from the Pervomaisky District Department of Internal Affairs of Minsk, turned off the engine, and the riot policemen began to beat everyone. The guy with the tattoo on his neck was hit the most. They beat and insulted all the detainees because of their political views.

There is evidence that they used an electric shocker, beat them with shields, pointed a weapon in the face and pulled the trigger, the weapon was unloaded.

Some of the transfers were particularly brutal. The arrested were transported in paddy wagons to other places of detention on their knees on the floor, face down, while their hands were tightly tied behind their backs with construction ties. For an hour and a half of driving, people's hands became purple, they suffered from pain. The guards did not loosen the ties. In particular, this was how they were convoyed to the IVS in Zhodino.

Some of the detainees were beaten for political reasons and for reasons of hostile attitudes due to the difficulty of carrying out heavy duty.

## **Torture and cruel and inhuman treatment in the militia bodies (regional departments of internal affairs)**

Practically all people detained at peaceful assemblies were taken by riot militia and other law enforcement to militia departments. In Minsk, this is the Department of Internal Affairs of the administrations of Zavodskoy, Leninsky, Moskovsky, Oktyabrsky, Partizansky, Pervomaisky, Sovetsky districts, as well as the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (GUBOPiK).

### **DELIVERY AND PLACES OF DETENTION IN MILITIA DEPARTMENTS. CONDITIONS OF DETENTION**

On September 13, those brought to the Moskovskiy District Department of Internal Affairs were kept in the assembly hall (according to the testimony of the detained V.).

On September 26, as the victim explained, the detainees were placed in the garage of the Leninsky district militia department. It is a small room with stone walls, one of which is missing, it was cold there. The detainees were mostly girls. *"We stayed there for several hours, it was very cold"* (victim R.).

On October 11, the detained Sergei, among 50 people, was taken to the Moskovskoe district militia department of Minsk, they were placed on the 4th floor in the assembly hall.

On the same day, those brought to the Sovetsky District Department of Internal Affairs were placed in the basement, put on their knees and with their head resting on the floor. Later they were allowed to stand facing the wall.

On October 18, those brought to the Leninskoe District Department of Internal Affairs were placed in an unheated garage, facing the wall. Detainees were also held in a nearby garage. There were over 60 people. They stood facing the wall, arms behind, legs apart. People stood like that from 15–16 p.m. until 1 a.m.

On November 8, according to one of the victims, they were taken to the Zavodskoye District Department of Internal Affairs. People were standing along the building, hands behind their backs. The militia officers copied their data and transferred them to the hall, allowed to sit on chairs.

On November 8, the detainees at the Central District Department of Internal Affairs were in the corridor on the 1st floor, facing the wall. When there was not enough space in the corridor, the detainees who were brought in later stood outside for several hours. At that time, it was +8°C in Minsk. Both men and women stood in the street.

On November 8, at the Sovetskiy District Department of Internal Affairs, the detainees stood for several hours in the courtyard of the militia department, facing the fence, with their hands up. The victim Evgenia had to stand for several hours “stretching” (the same position at the fence, but with her arms raised up and her legs wide apart). So the militia officer “punished” her for the speaking out loud.<sup>14</sup> By the evening it became very cold, it started raining, people were shaking. On that day, there were 8 detained women in Sovetskiy district militia department. The detainees spent the entire time standing. Only a man with a broken leg and two girls who felt bad were allowed to sit down.

Many detainees on that day noted that they were forced to stand facing the wall in the courtyard of the Sovetsky District Department of Internal Affairs of Minsk with their hands raised up for 12 hours, which caused them severe suffering. A militia officer in a balaklava periodically walked near them and beat those standing with a truncheon on the legs.<sup>15</sup>

All interviewees noted that they were taken to the toilet, they could drink water from the tap, and some were allowed to use the water they had. Despite the fact that many detainees were kept at the militia departments for up to ten hours or more, they were not provided with food.

On November 8, Irina Markelova, after being arrested, was taken to the Zavodskoy District Department of Internal Affairs. *“On the street, we stood facing the wall for 10–15 minutes, and then we were transferred to the assembly hall, where there were many beaten guys. Some had paint on their faces, their hair was cut, and they limped”*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <https://lady.tut.by/news/mylife/708361.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxyzCSBbowl>

<sup>16</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/707274.html>

Thus, in violation of the Rules of Detention of an Individual, in respect of whom administrative detention was applied, citizens brought to militia departments were often held in places that were not adapted for this, which caused them mental and physical suffering, it was inhuman, degrading treatment.

### **NOTIFICATION OF RELATIVES ABOUT DETENTION AND LOCATION**

On September 2, the victim asked the officers of the Frunzenskiy District Department of Internal Affairs to make a phone call, he was answered: “later, later”. As a result, the opportunity to call was not provided.

According to the reports of the detainees on September 26, they asked many times to call their relatives, but they were not allowed to call. All phones were taken away. *“The girls asked to send messages or something else, they were told that it was not supposed to. When he was sent to Akrestsin, his mother saw him through the crack of the fence, and she was told that he was not in this district department of internal affairs”* (according to the testimony of the detained P.).

The detainee on October 4 I was told at the Moskovsky district militia department that I would not be allowed to call. They did not react to my words. Later, the detainee’s brother told him that he himself phoned the militia department and there they lied that the relatives had been notified (testimony of K.).

All these actions are a violation of the law — part 3 of Art. 8.2. Of the Procedural Code of the Republic of Belarus — and cause both the detainees and their relatives moral suffering, because the fate of their loved ones was unknown to them for a long time.

### **PHYSICAL ABUSE**

On September 2, the victim Aleksey, a doctor, said that when he was brought to the Frunzenskiy district militia department, the riot militia officers who were detaining him pushed him to the floor, struck several blows to the left and right on the head. It was in front of the militia department officers, they did not interfere.

On September 13, the victim was detained together with her son and taken to the Frunzenskiy militia department. At the entrance there were riot militia officers with machine guns. The detainees were forced to leave with their heads down, insulted: “you are nobody, call you nobody. You are not people, just wordless

creatures. They put them facing the wall”. Their leader selectively took young people and hit them. *“There were militiamen in the yard, they just watched. We were taken to the assembly hall of the militia department. The riot police left. The militia behaved well towards us. It was just amazing”* (message from D.).

*“On September 13, when we were taken to the Central District Department of Internal Affairs, taking us out of the transport, riot militia officers and someone in civilian uniforms «walked us through the corridor»: they made us run towards the garage in a bent position, hands behind our back, while kicks were struck on the buttocks, they punched us on the head. The garage had a concrete, uneven floor, there were many people, presumably between 30 and 50 years old, who knelt with their legs crossed and rested their foreheads on the ground, their arms crossed behind their backs. I realized that I needed to do the same, and in the free space I lay down in this position. It was very painful to lie down, later I could not squat for a week and a half because of pain in my knees, my legs became numb, I could not turn my head, I could not move, I could not do anything. Those who did not obey, judging by the sounds, were beaten”* (victim L.).

The victims noted that the officers of the militia department rarely used physical violence, everything was limited to pushes, single blows to those persons who, in their opinion, behaved incorrectly. Unreasonable violence, actively and massively used by riot militia officers, took place with the tacit consent and non-intervention of militia officers.

## **FACTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE**

ΠThe victim noted that on September 26 the officers of the Frunzenskiy District militia department generally treated the detainees normally. But one of them, in a green sweater, without a mask, repeated several times: *“Say thank you that you are not beaten”*. He took white-red-white flags from the detainees’ belongings and destroyed them.

The girl said that it was her personal thing, it costs 30 rubles. There is a check. He laughed at this and said: *“File a complaint against me”* (testimony of S.).

On October 11, Pervomayskiy District Department of Internal Affairs, the detainee notes that the officers behaved correctly, but there were several officers who insulted the detainees and made derogatory statements.

On October 18, the victim explained that the “locals” (officers of the Leninsky District Department of Internal Affairs) did not beat the detainees, but when the riot militia brought a new batch of detainees, they kicked and punched them.

**All interviewed persons noted an extremely difficult psychological state caused both by the violence applied to them, and by violence against those who were nearby, as well as by the appearance of the victims who had visible injuries.**

### **(NOT) PROVIDING MEDICAL CARE**

On September 2, the man was beaten during his arrest and asked to call an ambulance. The officer's answer was: "not allowed" (testimony of S.)

The detainee informed the Committee that on September 27, his ear was bleeding heavily, but he, like the rest of the detainees, was not called an ambulance, although one of the militia officers reported this to the chief (S.'s testimony).

The victim said that on October 11, officers of the Pervomaisky militia department refused to provide medical assistance to a young man with an eye injury. Another detainee with a bleeding head was taken somewhere, then he returned with a bandaged head (testimony of T.).

On October 12, one of the detainees was taken to the Frunzenskiy district militia department. The state of health was heavy, because riot police were beating him during detention and transfer. He lost consciousness several times, including when he was questioned at the militia department. Only after drawing up a protocol and signing several sheets of materials of the administrative case, the militia officer brought water and tea. With the consent of the superior officer, he called an ambulance, the victim was taken to the hospital (M.'s testimony). Another victim, who was brought to militia department with other 30 people, almost all of whom were beaten, explained that many asked to call an ambulance, but they were denied this (Ch. Testimony).

Thus, **the decision to provide medical assistance depended on the discretion of the militia officers. In a number of cases, medical assistance was provided not timely, or militia completely refused to provide it, despite the visible injuries of the detainees.**



# **Torture and cruel and inhuman treatment in places of pre-trial detention of detainees and in places of serving administrative arrest**

## **TEMPORARY DETENTION CENTER AT 36 AKRESTSIN STREET, (IVS)**

Upon admission to the temporary detention facility, some of the detainees were put into narrow rooms with an area of 1 square meter (“glasses”), 4–5 people in each. People were left there for 1.5–2 hours.

Officers behave with the detainees in a rude manner, speak obscene words, humiliate, threaten with criminal prosecution. The mattresses and blankets are very dirty and smell very unpleasant. No security and sanitation measures were taken in connection with COVID-19.

There were cases when people who were beaten were immediately taken to a single punishment cell, even 4 people, and kept there for 10 days. At the same time, they were not given mattresses or other bedding. The punishment cell is a room with an area of 3.2 x 1.7 m<sup>2</sup>, with a concrete tiled floor, concrete walls, a stool in the middle, a toilet, and a bed bolted to the wall. There are no windows and ventilation in the punishment cell. They did not take them out for a walk, did not provide medical assistance, and did not provide drinking water. People were forced to sleep on the floor. The staff did not respond to complaints and demands to call the head of the temporary detention facility and stated that the head knew about their situation. Obviously, this was done to hide the injuries of the detainees.

Sergei Maslovsky was detained in punishment cell No. 7 of the IVS for 24 days from 12.10.2020, despite the fact that the medical staff were informed about his poor health condition and heart problems. Already on October 13, 2020, he became very ill, his blood pressure increased, and they had to take him to the hospital. However, a few days later, when his condition stabilized a little, he was returned to the IVS and put in the same punishment cell. Such treatment can be



described as torture, which was used as a punishment for a former employee of the internal affairs bodies.

Activist Dmitry Dashkevich was together with him in the same punishment cell from 10/25/2020.

Absolutely all respondents say they have not been provided with drinking water. Many testify that the cells were stuffy, but the vents were not opened, people did not have enough oxygen. At the same time, when there was no heating yet, it was very cold in the cells, especially at night.

Before the trial, some people were not fed, they only brought tea in the morning. Some testify to the confiscation of mattresses, people had to sleep on beds without any bedding.

### **CENTER FOR ISOLATION OF OFFENDERS AT 36 AKRESTSIN STREET (CIP)**

All respondents testify to a boorish attitude when they get there and further communication, people are insulted, they are called “insects”. No safety and sanitation measures were taken in connection with COVID-19.

In September it was very cold in the cells, but the vents were not closed. Drinking water was not provided to the cells; they had to drink from the tap. People were not taken to the shower or for a walk.

Elena Levchenko testifies that on September 30 she was detained and taken to the CIP. On October 2, everyone in their cell was ordered to roll up their mattresses and carry them outside the cell. No more mattresses were returned to them. People were forced to sleep on bare bunks for the rest of the 13 days, which made their back hurt. After that, the flush in the toilet and hot water were turned off in the cell. She also got lice. When she told the head of the CIP Yevgeny Shapetko about this, he said that this is done on purpose and he determines the conditions in which the prisoners are here: *“This is all done so that you do not want to return here”*. Thus, the head of the CIP admitted that **such inhuman conditions are being created deliberately**.

People awaiting trials are placed facing the wall in the CIP and not are allowed to turn. So people can stand for 3–5 hours. Some testify to the overcrowding of the cells, for example, 8 beds for 10 people in the cell. On the day of the trial, when transferred to another institution, the detainees are not given breakfast.

Medical assistance is not provided, and there is no daily round by the health worker. Complaints about deteriorating health are mostly ignored. There is evidence that Olga Kovalkova, a member of the Presidium of the Coordinating Council, demanded medical assistance, but it was not provided.

There are facts when the employees of the CIP did not accept the parcels from the relatives due to the alleged absence of this person in the institution while he was there.

### **PRE-TRIAL PRISON IN ZHODINO (IVS ZHODINO)**

The respondents noted a boorish attitude towards detainees, insults, humiliation, and the use of torture.

People were forced to stand facing the wall for several hours, some with their hands up, while they beat them with a truncheon or rubber band on their legs and buttocks. They were led down long corridors, forced to squat a total of 300 times. Forced to go squatting. Some claim that they were required to crawl on all fours for some distance. For non-compliance with these requirements, guards shouted and could hit. All this was done in connection with the political convictions of the detainees. In one of the rooms, a white-red-white flag lay on the floor, and officers demanded to walk on it, thereby humiliating the dignity of the protesters. Some were insulted during registration, calling them “roosters”, “goats”, which is considered very offensive in places of detention.

Before the heating was turned on, it was very cold in the cells, people were freezing. All cells have no toilet doors, which does not provide privacy. There was a case when a guard prematurely entered the shower, where women were taking shower.

If the detainees were brought from the militia department, i.e. not yet arrested, then 16 people could be put in a cell for 8 people, there were not enough beds for them. At the same time, mattresses and other sleeping accessories were not provided. Not fed before the trial. There was no toilet paper.

Some interviewees stated that the employees accepted a parcel for them from their relatives, but they did not give it to them, or things were missing from it. They take out for a walk very rarely — once every 5–7 days for 10–15 minutes. They took me to the shower for 7–9 minutes.

All interviewees stated that prisoners were distributing food. It is obvious that the prisoners do not have any kind of health book, and it is prohibited to involve them in the distribution of food.

Medical assistance is not provided, people with COVID-19 symptoms demanded a medical examination, but apart from paracetamol pills, they were not given anything. PCR test for COVID-19, fluorography or X-rays were not done to anyone. Many fell ill by whole cells: after their release, everyone tested positive for COVID-19, some developed pneumonia.<sup>17</sup> Thus, **people's lives and health were purposefully endangered.**

### **PRE-TRIAL PRISON (SIZO BARANOVICHI)**

The cells are very cold and damp, which is why the detainees often fell ill. They give out old dirty and damp mattresses and dirty linens.

Sanitary conditions are unsatisfactory, sanitary measures are not being taken as part of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Some cells have three-tiered bunks, very high, difficult to climb and fearful to fall. The distance between the second and third tiers is 40 cm, it is very difficult to get up, you have to bend unnaturally.

*The very conditions of transportation and transfer of detainees, as well as the keeping of people in cells of all institutions, do not comply with sanitary standards and measures that need to be taken for safety in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be taken into account that these people did not commit criminal offenses and are not dangerous criminals, but only went to peaceful meetings. The state may not place these people in places of detention, thereby not putting their lives at risk in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.*

*Everywhere in all institutions where detained protesters are serving their arrest, after October 8, they were forbidden to lie and sit on beds from 6 to 22 hours. The mattresses had to be rolled up and folded on the top bunk. It was only allowed to sit at the table on wooden benches or walk. The bright fluorescent lamps were no longer turned off at night. They banned the*

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<sup>17</sup> <https://health.tut.by/news/disease/709459.html>

*transfer of cigarettes, as well as pens and paper, which makes it impossible to appeal against administrative arrest in a timely manner. According to the staff, this was done after inspections from Minsk by order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in order to specifically worsen the conditions of detention of the protesters.*

*Courts considering cases of people detained for peaceful gatherings do not pay attention to beaten people and inhuman conditions of their detention, even when it is said in court about it. As state officials, judges are obliged to take measures to prevent torture, cruel and inhuman treatment.*

## **Persons involved in torture and cruel and inhuman treatment**

Practically all of the respondents stated that it was difficult to identify the persons involved in torture and ill-treatment during detentions and in the militia department. This is due to the lack of identification marks on the staff, often they were not in uniform, some people in the form of shoulder straps were turned inside with marks. Practically all law enforcement officers work in balaclavas.

Despite this, we believe that the responsibility for the unlawful use of physical force, special equipment during detentions, which led to physical injuries of participants in peaceful assemblies, is borne by the heads of the law enforcement structures that made arrests and dispersals, and directly by the officers who carried out the violence.

Responsibility for the use of unlawful physical and psychological violence, the creation of conditions that do not meet the minimum standards for the detention of detainees, the failure to provide medical assistance to victims of violence in the militia department lies with the heads of the relevant internal affairs bodies and directly the militia officers who carried out the violence.

The direct executors who escort the detainees and arrested to places of detention are responsible for torture upon transfer to militia departments and other places of detention (transfer).

The heads and employees of these institutions, the direct executors, as well as those high officials who ordered the deliberate deterioration of conditions of detention and restrictions on the parcels after 8 October 2020 are responsible for the torture of people held in places of detention (IVS, CIP, IVS Zhodino, SIZO Baranovichi).

## Reaction of state bodies to allegations of the use of violence, torture, cruel and inhuman treatment

**The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus**, represented by Belarusian human rights organizations (hereinafter referred to as the Committee), in the period from September to November sent 11 applications to initiate criminal cases on the facts of violence, torture and the use of weapons and explosive ammunition during peaceful assemblies.

On **September 10**, the Committee appealed to the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Belarus with a demand to respond to the abductions of people by unidentified subjects wearing balaclavas without uniforms and other insignia.<sup>18</sup>

On **September 14**, the Committee appealed to the Investigative Committee with a demand to open a criminal case against a militia major who hit a woman in Zhodino.<sup>19</sup>

On **September 30**, the Committee appealed to the prosecutor's office of the City of Minsk with a demand to inform the public about the work done in connection with the torture in the temporary detention center and CIP on Akrestin a str.<sup>20</sup>

On **October 12**, the Committee appealed to the Department of the Investigative Committee for the city of Minsk with a demand to initiate criminal proceedings on the fact of the brutal dispersal of a peaceful protest in Minsk.<sup>21</sup>

On **October 13**, the Committee made a statement to the Minister of Internal Affairs Y.Kh. Karaev. on the use of stun grenades and gas against participants in a peaceful meeting of pensioners on October 12.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/271>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/273>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/pravozaschitniki-potrebovali-prokuraturu-gorod-minska-otchitatsyaa>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/285>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/286>

On **October 19**, the Committee appealed to the Department of the Investigative Committee for the city of Minsk with a demand to initiate criminal proceedings on the fact of the use of violence and weapons by the law enforcement against peaceful demonstrators in Minsk on October 18.<sup>23</sup>

On **October 26**, the Committee appealed to the Department of the Investigative Committee for the city of Minsk with a demand to initiate criminal proceedings on the fact of the use of weapons, ammunition and violence by the law enforcement against peaceful demonstrators in Minsk on October 25.<sup>24</sup>

On **November 1**, the Committee filed an application to the Department of the Investigative Committee of the Minsk Region with a demand to initiate criminal cases on the fact of abuse of power. On October 29, a militia officer purposefully hit Yegor Kotov in the face, which was recorded by a video camera at the entrance and got into the media.<sup>25</sup>

On **November 2**, the Committee submitted an application to the Department of the Investigative Committee of the city of Minsk with a demand to initiate criminal proceedings on the facts of the use of special equipment, weapons and explosive ammunition on November 1 at the rally “March against terror”.<sup>26</sup>

On **November 9**, the Committee submitted an application to the Department of the Investigative Committee of the city of Minsk with a demand to initiate criminal proceedings on the facts of the use of violence and special means on November 8 at the “March of People’s Power”.<sup>27</sup>

On **November 16**, the Committee filed an application to the Department of the Investigative Committee of the city of Minsk with a demand to initiate criminal proceedings on the facts of the use of violence, special equipment and ammunition on November 15, at the rally “I’m going out”.<sup>28</sup>

On **November 23**, the Committee filed an application to the Department of the Investigative Committee of the city of Minsk with a demand to initiate criminal proceedings on the facts of the use of violence, special equipment and ammunition on November 22 on the action “March against fascism”.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/288>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/290>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/291>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/292>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/297>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/300>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.ligin.by/posts/302>

As of **December 1**, 2020, not a single criminal case has been initiated on any allegations of torture, disproportionate use of violence, special equipment, weapons and ammunition. After 3 months of examinations, the Investigative Committees refuses to initiate criminal proceedings against the victims, some examinations are suspended, although there is evidence of torture, confirmed by forensic medical examinations. However, this does not prevent the investigating authorities from opening criminal cases against the demonstrators themselves. Thus, **more than 900 criminal cases** have already been initiated.<sup>30</sup>

The practice of initiating criminal cases against the victims themselves who filed appeal against torture continues, they are accused of violence against militia officers (Article 364 of the Criminal Code) or resistance to a militia officer (Article 363 of the Criminal Code).

In connection with the criminal prosecution of victims of torture, new victims are afraid to file complaints against torture. In fact, the country does not have legal norms regarding the investigation of torture.

The state ignores its obligation to conduct a prompt and impartial investigation in accordance with Article 12 of the Convention against Torture.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://naviny.media/new/20201117/1605603646-glava-pa-obse-sdelal-zhestkoe-zayavlenie-po-belarusi>