

URGENT ACTION

TWO YOUNG BROTHERS ON DEATH ROW

Brothers, Stanislau and Illia Kostseu aged 19 and 21, were sentenced to death on 10 January for the murder of their next-door neighbour. When the verdict was read out in the Mohilev regional court, eastern Belarus, the public gallery applauded the decision. The Supreme Court hearing on their case will happen soon and if the sentence is upheld they will be at imminent risk of execution. The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, and their death sentence should be commuted.

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

Gennady Bronislavovich Davydko
Chair of the Human Rights Commission
Chair of the Parliamentary Group on Death Penalty Abolition
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Dear Mr Davydko,

On 10 January the Mohilev regional court sentenced brothers **Stanislau and Illia Kostseu** to death for the April 2019 murder of their former teacher and next-door neighbour. Allegedly, she had complained to authorities that their sister, Hanna Kostseu, was failing to properly look after her four children which would have put the children at risk of going into care. Stanislau and Illia Kostseu were only 18 and 20 at the time of their arrest.

While not seeking to excuse the crime committed or downplay the suffering caused, no state should resort to the death penalty, whatever the crime. The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment – including for the family of those sentenced – and has no place in any criminal justice system today.

As experienced now by their sister Hanna Kostseu, the death penalty in Belarus is not only a punishment for the convicted but also for their families, who receive no notification about the time or place of execution. 'To receive a letter from them one day and then soon after to receive a document stating that the execution took place is the cruellest thing,' Hanna Kostseu has said publicly. After the murder, the Kostseu family have faced regular threats and harassment and Hanna Kostseu's children were bullied at school. Eventually, the family had to leave their hometown of Cherykaw.

Despite mounting domestic and international pressure, Belarus remains the only country in Europe and Central Asia which continues to apply the death penalty. In addition to Stanislau and Illia Kostseu, three other prisoners are believed to be on death row in Belarus.

As Member of Parliament heading the parliamentary work on human rights and on the death penalty, I urge you to take whatever steps are possible to ensure that the death sentences of Stanislau and Illia Kostseu, as well as those of others sentenced to death in Belarus, are immediately commuted, and that a moratorium on death sentences is introduced, as a first step to full abolition in the future.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The death sentence of these two young brothers has shocked many people in Belarus and the international community. In recent years, Belarus has repeatedly stated its commitment to ending executions in its own time, expressed willingness to engage in the subject and continues to court the international community in this regard. Despite this, it persists in sentencing and executing people (in 2019, three death sentences were passed and at least three men were executed and there are currently five men on death row).

In this case, the two brothers killed their neighbour after she had complained to social services and accused their sister of not properly looking after her own children. That complaint put the children at risk of going into care. After finding out about the complaint the two brothers got drunk and took revenge on their neighbour by killing her. They were only 18 and 20 at the time. Amnesty International is not condoning what they did and is advocating for their sentence to be changed to a prison term. The authorities must take into account the conditions surrounding their case and adopt a rehabilitative approach rather than vengeful, punitive one.

Death sentences in Belarus are implemented in strict secrecy and without giving adequate notice to the condemned prisoners themselves, their families or legal representatives. The authorities refuse to return the bodies of those executed to their relatives or even tell them where they are buried. Executions are carried out despite requests from the UN Human Rights Committee to the government. The committee requests to review each case prior to execution. In November 2012, the Human Rights Committee found that the application of the death penalty in Belarus violates the human rights of those condemned and their families.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception, as a violation of the right to life, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Amnesty International supports calls, included in six resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly since 2007, for the establishment of a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty. As of today, 142 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Russian or Belarusian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 21 May 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: **Stanislau Kostseu** (he/his) and **Illia Kostseu** (he/his).

And copies to:

HIS EXCELLENCY MR SERGEI ALEINIK

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