

URGENT ACTION

STOP EXECUTION OF TWO YOUNG BROTHERS

On 22 May, the Supreme Court of Belarus upheld the death sentences of young brothers Stanislau and Illia Kostseu, aged 19 and 21 respectively. They have appealed to President Lukashenka for clemency. The President has granted clemency only once since coming to power in 1994. If clemency is denied, Stanislau and Illia Kostseu will be executed imminently.

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

President of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka
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220016, Minsk
Belarus
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Email: contact@president.gov.by

Dear President,

*I am writing to appeal to your sense of compassion and humanity, as values which the people of Belarus greatly admire, and urge you to grant clemency to two young brothers on death row, **Stanislau and Illia Kostseu**. Their death sentences were upheld by the Supreme Court on 22 May, and they have now applied to you for clemency as their last chance. They are 19 and 21 years old, respectively.*

There is no doubt that the murder, for which they were convicted, is a serious crime. They have both expressed their deep regret and cooperated fully with the criminal investigation. Stanislau and Illia Kostseu are the youngest prisoners to be sentenced to death in Belarus for over ten years and their execution would be a terrible stain on Belarus' record. I urge you to take into account their young age, and the plea from their mother and sister who raised them after their father died, when deciding their fate.

The death penalty has been abolished in law or practice in every country in Europe and Central Asia, except Belarus, although there is a clear and welcome commitment from Belarus to join its neighbours and the global trend towards abolition.

With international attention currently on Belarus, granting clemency to Stanislau and Illia Kostseu would be a clear signal of Belarus' meaningful intention to end this practice. It would also give these very young men the opportunity to turn their troubled lives around and show that rehabilitation and reform is possible.

Please make this an historic moment for Belarus and its future, and grant clemency to Stanislau and Illia Kostseu and commute their death sentences to terms of imprisonment.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This case has shocked many in Belarus and the international community given Stanislau and Illia Kostseu's young ages and the difficult circumstances of their upbringing. Their father died when Stanislau Kostseu was only a few months old, leaving their mother struggling to bring up her children. Their older sister, Hanna, often acted as their primary carer. This case is the first time in over ten years in Belarus that such young men have been sentenced to death and the first time ever that two members of the same family are facing execution.

While the government of Belarus continues to state that it is moving towards abolition of the death penalty, this case is a shocking reminder that, in practice, the system remains essentially intact. Before their trial, President Lukashenka publicly stated: "They're scum, there's no other word for them. They have been in trouble before and have been punished." The President's personal intervention in the case at an early stage may have influenced their conviction, in a country where serious concerns about the independence of the judiciary remain.

Presidential elections in Belarus are scheduled for 9 August. There is already a huge crackdown on freedom of expression and assembly in the country, targeting opposition candidates, their teams and supporters, protestors, journalists and activists, which is drawing internal and international attention and criticism.

If clemency is denied, Stanislau and Illia Kostseu will be executed soon after. Neither they nor their family will be told the date or time of their executions or be granted a final meeting. Prisoners on death row in Belarus are executed by a shot in the back of the head, after only minutes' notice. This can take more than one bullet. Their family will learn of their executions only weeks later and will not be given their bodies for burial or told of the location of their graves.

Amnesty International and other organisations have called repeatedly for an end to the secrecy surrounding the death penalty in Belarus and recorded its devastating impact on the families of executed prisoners. For the Kostseu family, this trauma is made more unbearable given it is two very young brothers facing execution.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian, Russian.

You can also write in your own language. For a Russian language translation visit:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR49/2533/2020/en/>

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 31 July 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).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/2126/2020/en/>

And copies to:

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6 Kensington Court W8 5DL
020 7937 3288
Fax 020 7938 5985
uk.london@mfa.gov.by
www.uk.mfa.gov.by

Please do send copies of your appeals to Belarusian NGO Human Rights Centre "Viasna":

viasna@spring96.org

We are working very closely with them on this case and they are supporting the Kostseu family.