

URGENT ACTION

FREE LGBT+ ACTIVIST VICTORIA BIRAN

On 26 September human rights activist Victoria Biran was detained on her way to the Women's March in Minsk. Two days later she was sentenced to 15 days of administrative detention which she is serving at the infamous detention centre on Akrestina street which has become synonymous with torture. In numerous similar cases the detention has been extended. As an LGBT+ activist, Victoria Biran is at heightened risk of ill-treatment. She is a prisoner of conscience and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

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

Andrey Shved
Prosecutor General of the Republic of Belarus
Vul. Internatsionalnaya, 22
220030 Minsk, Belarus
Email: info@prokuratura.gov.by
Telegram: <https://t.me/prokuraturabelarus>
VK: <https://vk.com/prokuraturarbbel>
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/prokuraturaby>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/prokuraturaby>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/prokuraturaby>

Dear Prosecutor General,

I am deeply concerned about the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defender **Victoria Biran** under Article 23.34 of the Code of Administrative Offences ("Violation of the procedure for organising or holding mass events"). Victoria Biran was detained by masked riot police on her way to the Women's March in Minsk on 26 September and was likely targeted because she was carrying a rainbow flag. The police officer who later testified as a "witness" against Victoria Biran in court via a video link did not disclose his name and hid his face with a black mask. Although Victoria Biran has committed no offence and was only intending to exercise her rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, she was sentenced to 15 days of administrative detention. Victoria Biran is serving her sentence in the detention centre on Akrestina street, which has lately become synonymous with torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence, against detainees. Considering that Victoria Biran was likely targeted by police as an LGBT+ activist, I am concerned that she may be targeted with violence in detention.

Victoria Biran is a prisoner of conscience, deprived of their liberty solely for peacefully exercising their human rights, and her case is emblematic of thousands of persons in Belarus detained in recent weeks.

In the light of the above, I urge you to:

- Ensure that Victoria Biran and all other prisoners of conscience in Belarus are released immediately and unconditionally;
- Instigate a prompt, effective and impartial investigation into the circumstances of Victoria Biran's arbitrary arrest and trial with the use of an anonymous "witness", and into all reported human rights violations of detainees in Belarus, including torture and other ill-treatment, and ensure that all alleged perpetrators are brought to justice in fair trial proceedings.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

At the time of her arrest Victoria Biran was holding a rainbow flag and, according to her friends and fellow activists present at the scene, this drew the attention of riot police to her and resulted in her arrest.

According to countless first-hand testimonies, widely available photographic and video material, and medical documents, many, if not all of those detained during the overwhelmingly peaceful protests that followed the Presidential elections on 9 August, have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment during their arrest and in detention. The detention center on Akrestina street (commonly known just as "Akrestina"), in the Belarusian capital Minsk, where Victoria Biran is held, has become synonymous with the practice of beatings and other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The detention of Victoria Biran comes in the context of a drastic deterioration in the human rights situation in Belarus. During the electoral campaign period and following the presidential election on 9 August, there have been mass peaceful protests including against the widely disputed official results. Throughout, the authorities have engaged in an escalating campaign against the opposition and all dissenting voices. Thousands of people have been arbitrarily arrested by police, an overwhelming majority of them peaceful protesters or bystanders, and many apprehended in abduction-style arrest by masked plain-clothed men. They should all be immediately released, and all other human rights violations must stop immediately, including the dispersal of peaceful assemblies, mass arrests and the widespread ill-treatment and torture of detainees.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian, Russian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 25 November 2020

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Victoria Biran (she/her)

And copies to:

His Excellency Mr Sergei Aleinik
Embassy of the Republic of Belarus
6 Kensington Court W8 5DL
020 7937 3288
Fax 020 7938 5985
uk.london@mfa.gov.by
www.uk.mfa.gov.by