

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED RIGHTS DEFENDER DENIED MEDICAL CARE

Marfa Rabkova is a Belarusian human rights defender and the coordinator of the volunteer network of the NGO Viasna. She has been in pretrial detention since September 2020 and risks a lengthy jail sentence simply for her legitimate human rights work. Despite worrying symptoms and a deterioration of her health, the prison authorities have been denying her requests for medical care for months, including urgent dental treatment.

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

Prosecutor General of the Republic of Belarus
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Dear Prosecutor General,

I am deeply worried about the medical condition of **Marfa Rabkova**, a woman human rights defender and coordinator of the Volunteer Service of the Human Rights Center "Viasna", who since 17 September 2020 has been held in pretrial detention.

She has multiple health problems and has been denied medical care for months. According to her family, she has not been allowed to treat her aching teeth for over six months, and a part of her front tooth has chipped off. After contracting COVID-19 her lymph nodes became inflamed and she had pain in the lower abdomen for several months.

Marfa Rabkova, who faces up to 12 years in jail if convicted, is being targeted for her legitimate activities as a human rights defender, such as observing demonstrations and documenting evidence of human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment of peaceful protesters by law enforcement officials. Marfa Rabkova has committed no crime.

I urge you to take all the necessary steps to ensure that:

- **Marfa Rabkova is released immediately and all charges against her are dropped;**
- **Pending her release, she is urgently provided with adequate medical care and is treated in accordance with international human rights standards, in particular the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The detention of human rights defender Marfa Rabkova and other activists came 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 2020, there were mass peaceful protests against the widely disputed official results as well as against police violence and widespread human rights violations. Throughout, the authorities engaged in an escalating campaign against the opposition and all dissenting voices. Thousands of people were arbitrarily arrested by police, an overwhelming majority of them peaceful protesters or bystanders, and many apprehended in abduction-style arrests by masked plain-clothed men.

Marfa Rabkova, a member of the Human Rights Center "Viasna" where she coordinates the organization's Volunteer Service, and her husband, Vadzim Zharomski, were detained on the evening of 17 September 2020 by officers of the Interior Ministry's Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption (GUBAZIK). Their apartment was searched and money, personal belongings and IT equipment were seized. Vadzim Zharomski was later released but Marfa Rabkova was remanded and held in pre-trial detention. She was indicted for "training or other preparation of persons for participation in mass riots, or financing of this activity" (Part 3 of Art. 293 of the Criminal code), "participation in a criminal organization in any other form" (Part 2 of Art. 285 of the Criminal Code) and "incitement to hatred" (Art. 130 of the Criminal Code).

On 11 February 2021 Marfa Rabkova faced new criminal charges of "inciting social hostility to the government by a group of unidentified individuals" (Part 3 of Art. 130 of the Criminal Code) and "involvement in a criminal organization" (Part 2 of Art. 285 of the Criminal Code). If found guilty, Marfa Rabkova may be imprisoned for up to 12 years.

While being in pretrial detention Marfa's health deteriorated significantly and she is not receiving medical care.

According to the Human Rights Center "Viasna", throughout the presidential election campaign, during and after the 9 August election, 2020 members of Viasna faced harassment from the authorities, including administrative arrest, arbitrary detentions and attempted prosecution in connection with their human rights activities.

Seven Viasna members are currently in prison: chairperson Ales Bialiatski, deputy chairperson Valiantsin Stefanovich, lawyer Uladzimir Labkovich, Marfa Rabkova, head of Viasna's office in Homiel Leanid Sudalenka, volunteers Tatsiana Lasitsa and Andrei Chapiuk. On 3 November 2021 the court sentenced the head of Viasna's Homiel office Leanid Sudalenka and Viasna's volunteer Tatsiana Lasitsa to three and two and a half years in prison, respectively.

On 17 September 2021 dozens of Belarusian and international human rights organizations including Amnesty International, launched a campaign of solidarity with the imprisoned human rights activists of Viasna, #FreeViasna.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian, Russian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 11 January 2022

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Marfa Rabkova (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur49/3178/2020/en/>

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

Prison authorities postal address (for postal delivery):

(Eng): Pre-trial detention center No. 1. 220030, Minsk, vulica Valadarskaha 2

(Rus): СИЗО-1. 220030, г. Минск, ул. Володарского, 2

Salutation: Dear Head of the Pretrial Detention Centre

Calls: Marfa Rabkova should be urgently provided with adequate medical care and, pending her release, should be treated fully in accordance with international human rights standard in particular the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).

His Excellency Mr Maksim Yermalovich
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