

Amnesty Press Release: Imminent execution must be stopped

Wednesday, 07 October 2009

Amnesty International Press Release, 7 October 2009 Amnesty International has urged the President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenka to grant clemency to a man who may be facing imminent execution. Vasily Yusepchuk was sentenced to death by Brest Regional Court on 29 June 2009 for the murder of six elderly women. On 2 October his appeal to the Supreme Court was turned down leaving him 10 days from that date to apply to President Lukashenka for clemency. "The Belarusian authorities must also immediately declare moratorium on all executions and death sentences. They must commute without delay the sentences of all prisoners currently on death row to terms of imprisonment," said Heather McGill, Amnesty International's expert on Belarus.

Only one request for clemency has been granted since President Lukashenka came to power in 1994. The appeal comes on the eve of World Day against Death Penalty when activists will call on the authorities of Belarus -- the only country in Europe and Central Asia still applying capital punishment -- to abolish it.

Vasily Yusepchuk may have an intellectual disability and his lawyer has stated that he is illiterate and unable to tell the months of the year apart. He has alleged that he was beaten while in pre-trial detention on two separate occasions in January and in March. By granting clemency to Vasily Yusepchuk, President Lukashenka will make good declarations that Belarus is ready to declare a moratorium on the death penalty and make Europe a death penalty free zone.

Background

In Belarus the use of the death penalty is compounded by a flawed criminal justice system that administers capital punishment in a manner that violates international laws and standards pertaining to the death penalty. There is credible evidence that torture and ill-treatment are used to extract "confessions".

Condemned prisoners are given no warning that they are about to be executed, and they are usually executed within minutes of being told that their appeal for clemency has been rejected.

They are taken first to one room, where, in the presence of the Director of the detention facility, the Prosecutor and one other Ministry of Interior employee, they are told that their appeal for clemency had been turned down and that the sentence will be carried out. They are then taken to a neighbouring room where they are forced to their knees and shot in the back of the head.

Their families will only be informed days or sometimes weeks after the execution that their relative has been executed.

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

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