

URGENT ACTION

LIFE OF HUNGER-STRIKING PRISONER AT RISK

Punk musician, Ihar Bantsar, has been on a hunger strike since 3 March to protest against his prolonged detention on trumped-up criminal charges. He has been imprisoned solely for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and he must be immediately and unconditionally released.

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

Prosecutor General Andrei Shved
Internatsionalnaya Str., 22
220030 Minsk
Republic of Belarus
Email: info@prokuratura.gov.by

Dear Prosecutor General,

I am writing to express my serious concern for the welfare of detainee, **Ihar Bantsar**, who has been on a hunger strike since the start of his trial on 3 March 2021 to protest the charges against him. His health has seriously deteriorated and he is in need of urgent medical attention. Instead, on 17 March he was notified that he has been given three days in a punishment cell for a 'violation of the [prison] regime'.

Ihar Banstar was detained in Hrodno, western Belarus, on 20 October 2020, after he danced in front of police cars wearing a thong during protests. His actions were entirely peaceful and constitute a legitimate exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Nonetheless, he was charged under Article 339.1 of the Criminal Code of Belarus (hooliganism) and he remains in detention in Prison No.1 in Hrodno.

Ihar Banstar has been targeted by the authorities as part of the broader, egregious human rights crackdown on peaceful protesters in the wake of the widely-contested presidential election in August 2020 in violation of Belarus' obligations under international human rights law. His human rights have been violated and his health is at risk.

I call on you to:

- **Drop the criminal charges against Ihar Bantsar and immediately and unconditionally release him as he is being prosecuted solely for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly;**
- **Pending his release, ensure that Ihar Banstar receives adequate health care, in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and informed consent.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Belarus is in the midst of an unprecedented human rights crisis following the widely-contested presidential election on 9 August 2020. In the lead up to the election and since, tens of thousands of peaceful protesters and those expressing dissenting opinions, have been targeted by the authorities, often using excessive force. According to local human rights defenders, 290 people are either in prison or detention as a result of trumped-up criminal charges brought against them solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression or peaceful assembly. Former presidential candidates and members of their campaign teams, independent journalists and bloggers, human rights defenders, civil society activists and people from all sectors of society are amongst them.

There are widespread and consistent reports that detainees are held in poor conditions, deprived of adequate healthcare or exercise and denied contact with relatives including through denying them visits, receipt of much-needed food and clothes parcels and correspondence. Dozens have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment following flagrantly unfair trials.

Despite widespread condemnation from local and international human rights and intergovernmental organisations, Belarus shows no signs of ending its lawless targeting of those expressing dissent.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Belarusian or Russian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 13 May 2021

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Ihar Bantsar (he/him/his)