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BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS (2012-2013).

The situation of human rights in Belarus in 2012-2013 has remained stably critical. Despite some improvements, there haven't been any essential changes so far. Platform Innovation can report a number of striking cases of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of persons kept in custody (detained or imprisoned).

At the same time, Belarusian investigation and oversight bodies continuously attempt to hush these facts up and keep the respective investigatory process as perfunctory as possible so that the law enforcers who are guilty of torture and ill-treatment can avoid criminal charges and subsequent punishment.

All the cases of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment which are being monitored and looked into by our NGO demonstrate that the official investigators seek to:

1. impede the investigation
2. interrogate the victims in the absence of lawyers or legal representatives
3. keep the deadlines for various pre-checks and forensic studies as loose as possible
4. threaten and intimidate witnesses and victims
5. obstruct lawyers from getting familiarized with the case files
6. close criminal cases by whatever legal or illegal means

Just two examples of ineffective investigation of torture cases.

Vasiliy Sorochnik

Beaten up when interrogated by police officers of the Leninskiy Rayon Internal Affairs Department (Minsk) on 14 November 2012. The battery and torture lasted 6 hours: the officers wanted Vasiliy Sorochnik to admit guilt of committing a crime.

On Sorochnik's application, the facts of torture were checked, and a criminal case was instituted on 13 December 2012, which was suspended after the statement of the President of Belarus.

Despite the existence of unchallengeable proofs evidencing the guilt of the police officers from the Leninskiy Rayon Internal Affairs Department (Minsk) and regardless of evident contradictions in the criminal case cessation order, the Investigation Committee prevents the victim's lawyers from full and complete familiarization with the case files and responds to complaints and petitions by perfunctory and unmotivated replies.

Bogdan and Ivan Shkurko

The night between 17 and 18 November 2012, Lida, Grodnenskaya Oblast: brothers Bogdan and Ivan Shkurko were cruelly beaten up by policemen. Besides the battery, Ivan was also cynically insulted: the officers sprayed pepper gas inside his anus then brought him to a wasteland area and urinated on him.

Bogdan Shkurko was subjected to administrative charges for defiance of the police, and Ivan was charged criminally for the same.

Only on 5 March 2013, were faced with criminal charges under Article 426, Part 3 (abuse of authority or official powers).

Nevertheless, the Shkurkos continued to receive threats and demands to drop the charges. Larisa was subjected to several administrative cases. Ivan Shkurko faced a number of provocations arranged by officers of the Lida Rayon Internal Affairs Department. For the sake of security, the family had to agree to stop fighting with "the system" as the physical threat to Ivan Shkurko continued to persist.

It should be noted that the prosecuting authorities fail to discharge their oversight functions, and the Investigation Committee departments, though having the right to institute criminal cases, receive clandestine orders to either encourage the cessation of criminal cases against police officers or even to refuse to initiate such cases.