

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL QUOTE

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Belarus: Nobel laureate Ales Bialiatski and his colleagues mark four years behind bars amid relentless crackdown on critical voices

On 14 July 2025 it will be four years since Belarusian authorities arrested Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski and fellow human rights defenders Valentsin Stefanovich and Uladzimir Labkovich.

The three – all leading members of the Viasna Human Rights Centre – were targeted for documenting widespread human rights violations during the 2020 protests against the results of the widely contested presidential election in Belarus that year. They were arbitrarily arrested and prosecuted on trumped-up charges of “smuggling” and “financing” protests. In early 2023, a court sentenced Ales Bialiatski to 10 years in prison, while Uladzimir Labkovich received a seven-year sentence and Valentsin Stefanovich was sentenced to nine years’ imprisonment. Other members of Viasna were arrested too, some before and others after the three leading members.

“Four years is four years too many. On this sombre anniversary, Amnesty International stands in solidarity with Ales Bialiatski, Valentsin Stefanovich, Uladzimir Labkovich and all those unjustly imprisoned in Belarus. The international community must not let these brave human rights defenders be forgotten and should raise its voice for their release,” said Marie Struthers, Amnesty International’s Eastern Europe and Central Asia Director.

In recent months, President Alyaksandr Lukashenkahas issued several pardons releasing dozens of individuals described as political prisoners. Done clandestinely, most of their names are kept from the general public and the media. Among them is the prominent opposition activist and prisoner of conscience Siarhei Tsikhanouski who was serving an 18-year prison term, following his arbitrary detention in 2020. Whilst in prison, he was forcibly disappeared in 2021, his fate or whereabouts remaining unknown until his unexpected release on 21 June 2025 along with 13 other prisoners, under a presidential pardon.

Since mid-2024, more than 300 individuals imprisoned under politically motivated charges have been freed, but more than 1,000 others remain in prison. Among them are prominent prisoners like opposition leader Maria Kalesnikava and journalist Ihar Losik who remain forcibly disappeared and at risk of being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.

“The number of releases, mostly of unknown prisoners, does not rectify the fact that the Belarusian authorities have thrown more than a thousand people behind bars for taking part in peaceful protest and being voices of dissent. Today’s four-year anniversary of the detention of courageous human rights defenders who were trying to protect their rights is a cruel reminder of the ongoing injustice suffered by hundreds of people. Every person imprisoned under trumped-up charges simply for exercising their rights must be freed. There must be accountability for these human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests and fabrication of charges.”