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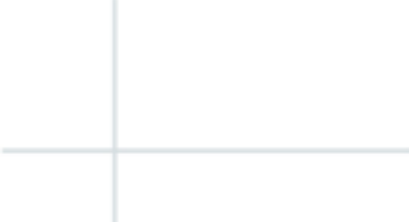
Belarus

Seventh Progress Report

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Public





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About the International Accountability Platform for Belarus

The IAPB is a coalition of independent non-government organisations that have joined forces to collect, consolidate, verify, and preserve evidence of gross human rights violations constituting crimes under international law allegedly committed by Belarusian authorities and others in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and its aftermath. To this end, the IAPB builds on the ongoing efforts of Belarusian human rights organisations to collect information about human rights violations committed in Belarus. The information and evidence collected by the IAPB will assist independent and fair criminal investigations and prosecutions, carried out in accordance with international law and standards, in national or international courts or tribunals that have or may have jurisdiction over those crimes. The information and evidence will also support other mechanisms aiming to ensure accountability for crimes under international law allegedly committed in Belarus, including the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Examination of the human rights situation in Belarus. The IAPB is composed of a Steering Committee, responsible for leading the IAPB's work, a secretariat, and an Advisory Council. The Steering Committee is composed of DIGNITY – Danish Institute against Torture (lead), Human Rights Centre “Viasna” (Viasna) (co-lead), International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus (co-lead) and REDRESS (co-lead). In addition to a number of Belarusian organisations that do not wish to be publicly listed for security reasons, the Advisory Council is composed of the following organisations: European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR); International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH); International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT); Norwegian Helsinki Committee; Physicians for Human Rights (PHR); Reporters Without Borders (RSF); and World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The work of the IAPB is carried out by a Secretariat composed of legal and medical practitioners with expertise and experience in international criminal investigations and prosecutions. The IAPB was launched on 24 March 2021 in response to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Moscow Mechanism rapporteur's report to the OSCE Permanent Council on 5 November 2020. Among other things, the report calls on States to hold perpetrators of torture and inhumane treatment, including sexual violence, and other gross human rights violations committed in the context of the 9 August 2020 presidential elections in Belarus to account. The IAPB is or has been supported by a wide range of States, notably Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as the European Union.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The documentation of alleged crimes under international law by a consortium of independent civil society organisations, conducted within the framework of international criminal law and adhering to established legal standards, creates a significant precedent in the pursuit of accountability for those responsible for these crimes. Previous accountability initiatives have primarily followed human rights documentation standards, which is valuable in establishing state responsibility for the human rights violations. However, such initiatives often lack critical information about alleged perpetrators and chains of command, and do not fully comply with legal admissibility standards within criminal justice procedures when gathering evidence. As such, the IAPB stands out as a civil society mechanism devoted to documenting gross human rights violations constituting crimes under international law and assisting criminal justice authorities in their investigation and prosecution of alleged perpetrators of international crimes.

The IAPB provides information upon request for assistance from states, collaborates with the UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus (GIEB), with the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur and with civil society organisations and lawyers working on Belarus, while also proactively promoting accountability by national, regional and international courts, tribunals and human rights bodies.

Situation on the Ground

The level of repression against political opposition, civil society and those who express dissenting political opinions in Belarus remains high. As of 29 September 2024, 1,325 political prisoners remained in detention, including prominent Belarusian human rights defenders. Several well-known political prisoners remain

held incommunicado, in punitive isolation cells, solitary confinement, and deprived of access to medical care. Article 411 ("*Disobedience to prison administration*") of the Belarusian Criminal Code was used to arbitrarily extend the sentence of political prisoners. In its resolution on the severe situation of political prisoners, on 19 September 2024, the European Parliament expressed concern about the 300,000 Belarusians who have been forced to leave Belarus since 2020 and face political persecution abroad.

As of 9 September 2024, 4,396 individuals were listed on the List of Organizations and Individuals Involved in Terrorist Activities, and trials *in absentia* against those who left Belarus also continued during the reporting period. On 7 October 2024, the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, an IAPB co-lead organisation, was listed as extremist formation in Belarus.

On 30 September 2024, the government of Lithuania referred the situation in Belarus – a non-ICC member state – to the International Criminal Court (ICC), requesting the ICC to examine whether it has jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute alleged crimes against humanity, including deportation, persecution, and other inhumane acts, committed by Belarusian senior officials since 1 May 2020.

Key achievements

During the reporting period, the IAPB collected information and evidence from 105 survivors/witnesses (46 women, 59 men) regarding alleged crimes under international law, bringing the total number of interviews to 2,637 (with 1,677 of those already coded for gender, 394 women, 1,283 men) and the collection to 29,492 documents in the IAPB's closed-source collection. By 30 September 2024, 18,222 files had been reviewed and the IAPB had collected over 1,223,315 items from open sources, including 197,271 videos, 560,242 images and 465,830 text items.

Since its establishment, the IAPB has received 8 requests for assistance from 5 states, 4 requests for information from the UN OHCHR Examination of the Human rights situation in Belarus (OEB), and, since April 2024, the UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus (GIEB), one request from the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur as well as several requests from civil society organisations and lawyers working on Belarus. In response, the IAPB has provided analytical reports, statistical data about evidence, contact details of witnesses and other relevant information.

Belarusian partners were trained to conduct interviews guided by a victim-centered approach, seeking to create – as much as possible under the given circumstances - a safe environment, explaining the purpose and process, allowing survivors to ask questions, and using open-ended questions in a setting that demonstrates empathy, patience and active listening.

Moreover, since April 2024, 81 survivors (41 women and 40 men) have benefitted from MHPSS services, bringing the total number to 564 since the beginning of Phase I. The IAPB has established a wide set of referral pathways to various reliable and evidence-based treatments

through healthcare professionals, medical centers, and legal support, while consistently working to improve this process, making it more accessible for survivors.

Assistance to accountability bodies

In the reporting period, the IAPB received three further requests for assistance from state authorities, held follow-up meetings with a third state authority with ongoing investigations, responded to the request of a non-governmental organization, and established contact with the newly instituted UN Group of Independent Experts (GIEB).

IAPB case-building work

In the reporting period, the IAPB focused its analytical work on the period from May through September 2020 and on further improvements to evidence-gathering standards and analytical work, including trainings on each underlying act for crimes against humanity, incorporating specific interview scenarios and legal framework as well as on the crimes of deportation and sexual and gender-based crimes (SGBC). The IAPB Secretariat maintains a close working relationship with the lead and co-leads' documentation teams, and engages in bi-weekly meetings and feedback sessions.

A. The situation on the ground

The level of repression against political opposition, civil society and those who express dissenting political opinions in Belarus remains high. Human rights organisations report that arbitrary detention, torture and other forms of ill-treatment during arrest and in detention, politically motivated charges, violations of fair trial guarantees during administrative and criminal proceedings, abusive application of the overly vague counter-terrorism and counter-extremism laws remain widespread. In total, there are 4,396 individuals listed on the “List of Citizens of the Republic of Belarus, Foreign Citizens or Stateless Persons Involved in Extremist Activities” as of 9 September 2024.¹

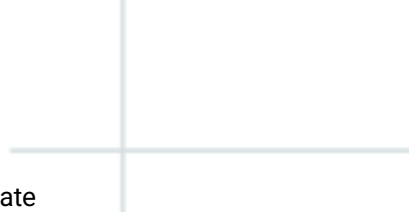
As of 29 September 2024, 1,325 political prisoners remained in detention,² including prominent Belarusian human rights defenders Ales Bialiatski,³ Valiantsin Stefanovic, Uladzimir Labkovich, Maria Rabkova, Andrei Chapiuk, and Nasta Loika.⁴ According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, as of August 2024, 37 journalists and media workers remain imprisoned in Belarus.⁵ From July to September 2024, 115 political prisoners who had been convicted of crimes related to their protest activity were pardoned by Aleksandr Lukashenko.⁶ At the same time, Belarusian human rights organisations documented 142 new arrests of political prisoners.

Several well-known political prisoners remain in incommunicado detention without possibility to contact their family or legal counsel,⁷ including Maksim Znak, Maria Kalesnikava, Mikalai Statkevich and Ihar Losik who have been deprived of contact with the outside world since February 2023.⁸ The last contact with Siarhei Tsikhanouski was made in March 2023, with Viktor Babaryka in April 2023, and with Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk in January 2024.⁹

Belarusian authorities continue to place those convicted on political grounds in punitive isolation cells (*SHIZO*), solitary confinement,¹⁰ and deprive them of access to adequate medical care.¹¹

Moreover, Article 411 (“*Disobedience to prison administration*”) of the Belarusian Criminal Code is actively used to arbitrarily extend the sentence of political prisoners.¹² As of August 2024, new criminal cases under Article 411 have been initiated against 47 political prisoners,¹³ and sentences imposed on at least five detainees under this article.¹⁴

Acts of persecution were reported also against family members of political prisoners,¹⁵ including at least 129 individuals who have been tried for administrative offences for receiving humanitarian aid through the social initiative INeedHelpBY from January to August 2024 (out of 129, 6 persons were tried from April to September 2024).¹⁶ More than 20 other individuals were in detention on criminal charges for assisting political prisoners, of which at least four persons were already sentenced to imprisonment.¹⁷



At least 38 entities were denounced as extremist organisations by the State Security Committee and the Ministry of Internal Affairs between April and August 2024,¹⁸ including the Association of Political Prisoners of Belarus and Deutsche Welle.¹⁹ On 7 October 2024, the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, an IAPB co-lead organization, was listed as extremist formation in Belarus.²⁰ Between February and September 2024, at least 70 persons were added to the List of Organizations and Individuals Involved in Terrorist Activities.²¹

Trials *in absentia* against those who left Belarus also continued during the reporting period. Between April and September 2024, at least 52 people were tried *in absentia* under politically motivated charges, and the vast majority of them were sentenced to imprisonment.²² This includes 20 individuals who advised or worked with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya,²³ as well as human rights defender Leanid Sudalenka.²⁴ In August 2024, Hrodna Regional Court found journalist and human rights activist Uladzimir Khilmanovich guilty of three extremism-related crimes in his absence.²⁵

Having been sentenced to death in June 2024 under six charges,²⁶ including for an “act of terrorism”, German Red Cross employee Rico Krieger was pardoned a month later by Aleksandr Lukashenko and returned to Germany as part of a political prisoner exchange between Germany, the United States of America and the Russian Federation.²⁷

Reports have also been received of Belarusian prisoners being used as cheap labour by private companies.²⁸

As a result of an investigation conducted by the Polish and Lithuanian authorities, on 6 September 2024, three Belarusian nationals were charged for forcing a Ryanair aircraft to land to arrest Roman Protasevich, the administrator of the Telegram channel @nexta_live, and his partner. The unnamed suspects were charged with unlawfully depriving 132 individuals of their liberty through terrorist acts and intending to seriously intimidate numerous people, including groups opposed to the Belarusian regime.²⁹

During the reporting period, Belarus’ compliance with its international human rights obligations was reviewed by the UN Committee against Torture, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the UN Committee of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.³⁰ In its report of 21 June 2024, the UN Committee against Torture concluded that “torture is a systematic practice in Belarus” for a number of reasons: the failure of law enforcement officials and prosecutors to act on complaints of torture, to conduct effective, prompt and impartial investigations into the complaints of torture or ill-treatment, and to prosecute perpetrators. The Committee against Torture further noted the ineffective complaint mechanisms and the absence of an independent mechanism for monitoring places of deprivation of liberty.³¹ The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted its concern about

administrative and other restrictions faced by members of national and other minorities on a number of rights.³²

On 19 September 2024, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the severe situation of political prisoners.³³ Among other things, it expressed concern about persecution in exile, e.g. the abuse of Interpol arrest warrants to achieve extradition of political opponents from non-EU countries; called on Serbia to refrain from extraditing Belarusian journalist Andrei Hnyot³⁴; and expressed concern about the 300,000 Belarusians who have been forced to leave Belarus since 2020 and face political persecution abroad.³⁵

On 30 September 2024, the government of Lithuania referred the situation in Belarus – a non-ICC member state - to the International Criminal Court (ICC).³⁶ With its referral, the Lithuanian government requests the ICC to examine whether it has jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute alleged crimes against humanity, including deportation, persecution, and other inhumane acts, committed by Belarusian senior officials since 1 May 2020.³⁷ Building on a previous ICC decision to accept jurisdiction over a non-ICC member state in the context of deportation (the Myanmar/Bangladesh situation), Lithuania argued that part of these crimes occurred on Lithuanian territory, and the territory of other ICC member states, bringing them within the Court's jurisdiction. The IAPB issued a press release welcoming the referral, but pointing out that this referral, if accepted, would cover only some of the crimes committed in Belarus.³⁸

B. Implementation of Core Objectives

a. Objectives and scope of work

- **Strategic Outcome 1:** Consolidate the IAPB's evidence hub by continuing to expand evidentiary sources, centralise the preservation of information and evidence, and analyse crimes under international law committed in Belarus in the context of the August 2020 election and its aftermath.
- **Strategic Outcome 2:** Expand the range of evidentiary and analytical products, accountability processes and other actors the IAPB's work outputs will effectively serve (including the OHCHR examination, other human rights mechanisms and bodies and criminal justice authorities).
- **Strategic Outcome 3:** Mainstream a survivor-centred, trauma informed approach to all aspects of the IAPB's work.
- **Strategic Outcome 4:** Ensure creation of standing infrastructure and the sustainability of the IAPB's operations.

b. Collection of information from survivor-victims and other witnesses

During the reporting period, the IAPB collected information and evidence from 105 survivors/witnesses (46 women, 59 men) regarding alleged crimes under international law, bringing the total number of interviews to 2,637 and the collection to 29,492 documents in the IAPB's closed-source collection. The newly collected interviews

provide information on arrests and detention, the treatment of detainees, and acts of intimidation by state authorities.

The IAPB continues to seek renewed informed consent from survivors/victims and other witnesses to ensure it remains current at the time any information and potential evidence they provided is shared with third parties. By 20 September 2024, over 800 witnesses have signed a new consent form. By 30 September 2024, 18,222 files had been reviewed and tagged by a team of dedicated bilingual (Russian-English) reviewers.

The IAPB has also collected over 1,223,315 items from open sources, including 197,271 videos, 560,242 images and 465,830 text items from over 800 sources. Videos containing speech have been processed using automated speech recognition software, resulting in the availability of 161,330 transcripts, which now facilitates comprehensive textual searches. Open-source information and materials inform IAPB's analytical work, providing valuable insights into individual incidents as well as the broader context.

c. Assistance to accountability bodies

i. Group of Independent Experts (GIEB)

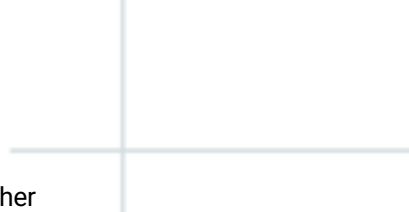
The IAPB was invited by the newly instituted UN Group of Independent Experts (GIEB) to submit relevant information or documentation related to this mandate by 30 November 2024. Already in August, the IAPB established contact with the GIEB³⁹ and its staff, which is continuing the work previously established by the OHCHR examination on the human rights situation in Belarus. The IAPB previously provided evidence and interview facilitation support to the OHCHR examination.

ii. Criminal justice authorities

In the reporting period, the IAPB received three further requests for assistance from state authorities and a request for additional information from one authority. It held meetings with each requesting authority and is analysing relevant closed and open-source material with a view to submitting the responsive reports in the forthcoming months.

In the context of supporting national prosecution authorities, the IAPB is currently developing two briefs that will be shared with the prosecution authorities who have already received information from the IAPB, as well as with any authorities that may request information in the future:

- (i) Brief on gender norms in Belarus and their relevance to the commission of gender-based violence, both before, during and after the August 2020 presidential elections; and
- (ii) Brief on barriers to disclosure of gender-based violence by victims/witnesses in the Belarus context.



The briefs are intended to inform criminal justice authorities and other accountability bodies and assist them in adopting a gender-sensitive approach in their investigations, analysis, and prosecutions of international crimes committed in Belarus.

iii. Non-governmental organisations and lawyers

In May 2024, the IAPB responded to a request for information submitted by a non-governmental organisation advocating for accountability for crimes under international law committed in Belarus. The request was to provide statistical data regarding the available evidence in relation to a specific crime, which has been duly fulfilled.

d. IAPB case-building work

In addition to responding to specific requests, the IAPB has identified core workstreams designed to improve future case-building. In the present period, the IAPB focused on further improvements to evidence-gathering standards and developing its analytical work incorporating lessons drawn from dialogues to date with prosecutors and civil society bodies.

i. Evidence-gathering

From the outset, a key concern for the IAPB and its partner organisations has been to ensure that evidence is collected to the highest criminal justice standards. Work undertaken to this end in this reporting period includes:

- Training on each underlying act for Crimes Against Humanity, incorporating both legal framework and specific interview scenarios/role-plays building on prior practice.
- More in-depth in person training days focused on two ‘core crimes’ for the IAPB this year, i.e. deportation and SGBC.
- Feedback loops between the IAPB and partner organisations on interviews being conducted in 2024 to ensure any areas of improvement are identified and necessary changes implemented.

ii. Analytical products

The IAPB’s analytical products are produced on a confidential basis for national and international prosecutorial authorities. The confidential status of these documents is essential at the case-building stage as it protects sensitive information, ensures the integrity of ongoing investigations, and prevents any potential interference that could arise from public disclosure. In future, the IAPB will also work with its partner organisations to make publicly available versions of documents in due course, for use by other organisations in pursuit of accountability, and as a legacy function.

The IAPB's present analytical focus is the 'core' period of pre and post electoral violence 2020, i.e., from May through September 2020 (which has also been the focus of most requests to date). Work streams in this reporting period have been:

- **Witness summaries.** National prosecutors have regularly requested witness summaries to enable quick and easy understanding of the available evidence. The IAPB analysts are producing short summaries of evidence for all interviewees in this time-period. The summaries are factual accounts but also include preliminary legal characterisation of events and will serve as important roadmaps for case-building.
- **"Linkage" analysis.** Many national investigating and prosecuting authorities request information on potential perpetrators. The IAPB has developed a comprehensive mapping of *de jure* state structures, including the security apparatus, drawing on open-source information.
- **Core "standing report" on contextual elements and underlying acts.** Prosecutors have regularly asked for 'big picture' information about the contextual elements of crimes against humanity and possible underlying acts in Belarus as well as more specific information about individual survivors.
- **Targeted tagging on closed-source platform.** The IAPB team are using the lessons learned from the witness summary project to refine the tagging of interviewee evidence as well as open-source data. All materials provided by witnesses are tagged to facilitate later searches, including details such as the personal information of the interviewee, the location of their arrest and detention, the state officials they encountered, the types of acts they were subjected to, and the documents they shared, such as court records.

iii. Country-based working groups

The IAPB organized a round-table on universal jurisdiction in September 2024 in Vilnius. The roundtable brought together relevant civil society representatives and lawyers to discuss the legal and institutional framework for universal jurisdiction in Lithuania, the current experiences in collaboration between NGOs and authorities, and available support for victims, in preparation of a working group meeting later in the year.

e. Knowledge sharing and capacity building

The IAPB Secretariat maintains a close working relationship with the lead and co-leads' documentation teams, engaging in bi-weekly meetings and feedback sessions. This unique structure facilitates the exchange of knowledge on pertinent matters, including medical documentation, general interviewing techniques, and collecting interview evidence on unlawful detention, torture, gender-based violence, and deportations.

The IAPB is benefiting from synergies created by the project "Combatting Impunity in Belarus", implemented by DIGNITY in close coordination with the IAPB Secretariat.⁴⁰ This project is separate from but complementary to the work

of the IAPB and aims to strengthen the capacity of key actors,⁴¹ including local partner organisations and representatives of relevant national and international authorities, to ensure justice and accountability for crimes committed by Belarusian authorities.

f. Facilitating access to mental health and psychological support

Belarusian partners were trained to conduct interviews guided by a victim-centered approach, seeking to create – as much as possible under the given circumstances - a safe environment, where survivors feel secure and respected. Interviewers explain the purpose and process, allow survivors to ask questions, and use open-ended questions that encourage victims to share their experience in their own words. They are instructed to listen actively, demonstrate empathy throughout the interview, allow for pauses, and be attentive to the well-being of the interviewee, in particular with regard to signs of trauma.

Informed consent is collected in a GDPR-compliant manner and following informed consent procedures. Moreover, the IAPB has systematically sought to renew initial consent forms to ensure that it remains up to date.

Documentation teams and Secretariat staff have also been encouraged to take the OSCE/ ODIHR e-course on trauma-informed interviewing⁴², developed by ODIHR's Human Rights Department, which enhances skills and knowledge in interviewing techniques and practicalities of the do-no-harm principle.

In addition, the IAPB provides survivors with evidence-based mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in a survivor-centered and trauma-informed manner. It has been working diligently to establish referral pathways for MHPSS and a comprehensive clinical monitoring and evaluation system, which includes monitoring stress, depression, sleep, and overall well-being.

The needs of survivors vary widely, and often a single organisation may not be equipped to address all support needs, especially in cases of mass violations. Therefore, establishing strong referral pathways to ensure access to specialized support systems is crucial. Strong referral systems also enhance organisations' capacity to engage with broader communities of survivors who may already be in touch with specific providers. A referral pathway linking survivors to services that provide healthcare, social, psychosocial, and legal support, and shelter is an integral part of the survivor-centered approach. Referrals should be prompt and direct where possible to avoid a situation where a survivor is bounced between support providers.

Since April 2024, 81 survivors (41 women and 40 men) have benefitted from the MHPSS services of the IAPB, bringing the total number to 564 since the beginning of Phase I. The IAPB has established a wide set of referral pathways to various reliable and evidence-based treatments through healthcare professionals, medical centers, and legal support, consistently working to

improve this process, making it more accessible for survivors.

The IAPB expanded the geographical area and increased the pool of specialists and medical centers in various countries to improve access to these services. The IAPB identifies and partners with initiatives and service providers that fulfill the necessary requirements and works closely with MHPSS specialists, exchanging feedback on the referral process and regularly analyzing referrals data to improve this process.

The IAPB delivered a training and mentoring of the national co-leads on survivor-centred research and advocacy, and forms of survivor engagement through a workshop delivered in-person in Vilnius in May 2024.

Furthermore, the IAPB is focused on ensuring that its own teams have access to MHPSS and is actively enhancing the capacity of all involved teams to address secondary trauma and stress. The organisation has also set up referral pathways for MHPSS provided by Russian/Belarusian and English language specialists for all IAPB team members.

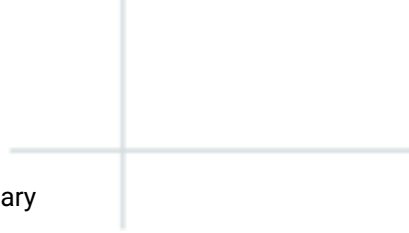
g. IAPB Infrastructure

The IAPB secretariat team consists of several members, including the Head, Project Manager, Project Officer, Senior Legal Advisor, Lead Analyst, Open-Source Investigator, Data Systems Manager, Junior Analysts, and Data Reviewers. On 15 August 2024, Ms. Andrea Huber took over as the new head of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus.

In addition to a number of Belarusian organisations that do not wish to be publicly listed for security reasons, the IAPB's Advisory Council is composed of the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

The IAPB continues to partner with leading digital investigation experts to manage its data collection. One of the leading expert organisations ensures ongoing service provision for the IAPB's closed-source evidence platform – a highly secure environment for hosting evidence gathered by our partners. The workspace includes advanced search, analytics, and custom object capabilities which allow for the rapid identification and categorization of critical information. It supports bilingual (English-Russian) data sets and customisable discovery spaces, making it suitable for collaborative investigations across different jurisdictions.

Furthermore, the IAPB draws on expertise in conducting open-source investigations and empowering human rights defenders in the documentation of grave violations of international crimes. This organisation continues to host and



optimise the analytical features of the platform's open-source evidentiary repository of over 1.2 million files.

Both technical partners are working with the IAPB on secure retention strategies to ensure long-term access to critical evidence for international accountability bodies while ensuring that the data is handled in accordance with international legal standards.

h. Funding

The IAPB Phase III is supported by Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the European Union.

Funding for the first year of Phase III has been secured thanks to generous contributions, while for years 2 and 3 of Phase III of the project the IAPB is still in the process of collecting pledges, finalizing agreements and reaching out to potential donors.

i. Ongoing challenges

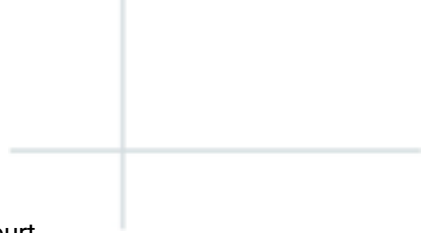
The circumstances and pressure under which the Belarusian co-lead organisations are forced to conduct their work constitutes one of the main challenges in the implementation of the project. Most prominently, this includes the difficulty of gathering evidence from Belarus.

Due to the escalating repressive environment in Belarus, victims and other witnesses are increasingly reluctant to consent to sharing info and evidence with accountability bodies. In line with GDPR requirements, IAPB only collects and shares info and evidence with the explicit consent of the individuals providing it and has systematically sought to renew the initial consent forms.

While the IAPB's continued receipt of requests clearly indicates the interest of criminal justice authorities in investigating and prosecuting alleged international crimes, some jurisdictions with access to witnesses and an established legal framework remain hesitant to initiate a formal investigation. Witnesses interviewed by the IAPB are currently based in 35 different countries.

One of the general challenges with preparing analytical products for criminal justice authorities is the broad scope of the requests, which in some cases encompasses all materials collected by the IAPB. To ensure that the IAPB support can target specific investigative needs and capacities, the IAPB developed guidelines for requests for assistance and continues to work with criminal justice authorities to refine their requests.

Finally, the limited attention afforded by the international community to human rights violations in Belarus in light of other crises situations, in particular the war in Ukraine and Gaza, constitutes a challenge.



Lithuania's referral of the situation in Belarus to the International Criminal Court brings important visibility to the situation in Belarus. However, the referral, if accepted, would cover only some of the crimes committed in Belarus.

j. Planning ahead

The IAPB continue to collect and analyse witness information, evidence, and open-source data to inform its standing report, which provides a factual and legal analysis of the situation in Belarus since May 2020, and will continue supporting criminal justice authorities and share available information and evidence as well as analytical products in response to the pending requests.

Following the referral of the situation in Belarus to the ICC by Lithuania, the IAPB will the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC in its preliminary examination, as well as offer support to other States who wish to consider joining Lithuania regarding the referral of the crime of deportation.

Moreover, the IAPB will continue to support the work of the UN Group of Independent Experts on Belarus by contributing to their investigations with the IAPB's evidence and information, and with the intention of strengthening the findings in the forthcoming report.

Developments in light of the forthcoming elections in Belarus in January 2025 will be carefully monitored. Strategic considerations for the time to come will include and reinforce discussions and work on ensuring the sustainability of the IAPB's operations, and its evidence base, as well as possible Phase IV objectives, should funding be available.

Note of gratitude

The IAPB wishes to take the opportunity to thank the generous donors, the organisations supporting the platform through its Advisory Council, all other partners and contributors, and its highly committed and expert staff and consultants.

ENDNOTES

¹ The misuse of legislation on countering extremism and terrorism to persecute those who express political opposition continued. Between April and September 2024, at least 409 persons were added to the “List of Citizens of the Republic of Belarus, Foreign Citizens or Stateless Persons Involved in Extremist Activities” for their participation in street protests or other forms of perceived dissent. See [“Update of the ‘extremists’ list’ and pressure on political prisoners: chronicle of persecution 6-9 September”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 09-Sep-2024.

² [“Political prisoners in Belarus”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, undated.

³ In July 2024, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention recognised the imprisonment of Ales Bialiatski as a violation of international law and demanded his immediate and unconditional release. See UN WGAD, Opinion No. 3/2024 concerning Aleksandr Bialiatski (Belarus), [A/HRC/WGAD/2024/3](#), 16-May-2024.

⁴ [“Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024.

⁵ [“IFJ and EFJ demand the release of jailed journalists on the 4th anniversary of the fraudulent elections”](#), *Belarusian Association of Journalists*, 09-Aug-2024.

⁶ 18 prisoners were pardoned in July, 30 persons - by the decree of 16 August, another 30 individuals – by the decree of 4 September, and 37 – by the decree of 16 September. See “Lukashenko pardons 30 people convicted of protest-related crimes”, *Belta*, 16-Aug-2024; “Lukashenko pardoned another 37 prisoners”, *DW*, 16-Sep-2024; “‘It is not an indication of serious changes in the human rights situation.’ Viasna human rights defenders comments on political prisoners’ release”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Jul-2024.

⁷ [“Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024.

⁸ “Gone but not forgotten: Political prisoners are being disappeared”, *The Washington Post*, 05-Jul-2024; “500 days in the uncertainty regime. What happened to Maria Kalesnikava?”, *DW*, 29-Jun-2024; Joint motion for a resolution on the severe situation of political prisoners in Belarus, *European Parliament*, RC-B10-0026/2024, 18-Sep-2024.

⁹ “CEDAW called Belarus to take urgent measures to protect Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 21-Mar-2023; “Gone but not forgotten: Political prisoners are being disappeared”, *The Washington Post*, 05-Jul-2024.

¹⁰ [“Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024.

¹¹ [“Political prisoner Polina Sharenda-Panasiuk has an abrupt health deterioration”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 04-Sep-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024.

¹² [“Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024.

¹³ “Belarusian political prisoners in high-security prisons: pressure intensifies”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 31-Jul-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024.

¹⁴ [“Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. July 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 08-Aug-2024.

¹⁵ [“Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024.

¹⁶ [“Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024; “Administrative prosecution under Article 24.15 of the Code of Administrative Offences”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, undated.

¹⁷ [“Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024.

¹⁸ 9 in April, 17 in May, 1 in June, 4 in July, 7 in August. See [“Human rights situation in Belarus. April 2024”](#), *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 08-May-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. May 2024”](#),

Viasna Human Rights Center, 06-Jun-2024; “Human rights situation in Belarus. June 2024”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 09-Jul-2024; “Human rights situation in Belarus. July 2024”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 08-Aug-2024; “Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024.

¹⁹ “Human rights situation in Belarus. August 2024”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024; “Human rights situation in Belarus. April 2024”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 08-May-2024.

²⁰ “The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus was recognised an extremist formation”, *Nasha Niva*, 07-Oct-2024.

²¹ Between February and July 2024, 46 persons were listed, 3 more were added in July, 9 persons – in August and 12 persons – in September. See “Extension of a ‘list of terrorists’, liquidation of public associations: chronicle of persecution 11 July”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 11-Jul-2024; “Arrest after a conversation in a chat-roulette, confiscation of a journalist’s flat: chronicle of persecution 12 July”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 12-Jul-2024; “Update of a ‘terrorist list’ and new arrests in Fanipol: chronicle of persecution 8 August”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 08-Aug-2024; “Arrest of an activist of a movement ‘For Freedom’, extension of ‘terrorist’ and ‘extremist’ lists: chronicle of persecution 4-5 September”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 05-Sep-2024.

²² “List of political prisoners and persons convicted in political criminal cases”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, undated.

²³ Telegram channel @viasna96, posted 10:01, 27-May-2024, <https://t.me/viasna96/26101>.

²⁴ “Human rights defender Leanid Sudalenka tried in absentia for facilitating extremist activities”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 12-Jun-2024. Leanid Sudalenka had previously been convicted under Article 342 (“Group actions grossly violating public order”) of the Criminal Code

²⁵ “Journalist and human rights activist Uladzimir Khilmanovich sentenced in absentia”, *Viasna Human Rights Center*, 21-Aug-2024.

²⁶ “Lukashenka pardoned German Rico Krieger, sentenced to death”, *Viasna No Death Penalty*, 31-Jul-2024.

²⁷ “Lukashenka pardoned German Rico Krieger, sentenced to death”, *Viasna No Death Penalty*, 31-Jul-2024.

²⁸ “German far-right MP Jörg Dornau reportedly used Belarusian political prisoners as forced labor on his onion plantations”, *The Insider*, 24-Sep-2024; “Lukashenko’s prisoners used as cheap labor by far-right German onion tycoon”, *Politico*, 24-Sep-2024.

²⁹ “Three Belarusian nationals charged for forcing Polish plane to land to arrest dissident”, *Eurojust*, 06-Sep-2024.

³⁰ See UN CRPD, Concluding observations on the initial report of Belarus, CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1, 26-Sep-2024; UN CAT, Report of the Committee against Torture, A/79/44, 21-Jun-2024; UN CERD, Concluding observations on the combined twenty-fourth to twenty-fifth periodic reports of Belarus, CERD/C/BLR/CO/24-25, 16-Sep-2024.

³¹ UN CAT, Report of the Committee against Torture, A/79/44, 21-Jun-2024, para. 46.

³² UN CERD, Concluding observations on the combined twenty-fourth to twenty-fifth periodic reports of Belarus, CERD/C/BLR/CO/24-25, 16-Sep-2024, para. 29.

³³ European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2024 on the severe situation of political prisoners in Belarus, 2024/2804(RSP), 19-Sep-2024.

³⁴ See further “Serbian appeals court overturns ruling to extradite to Belarus a critic of its authoritarian regime”, *AP*, 11-Sep-2024.

³⁵ European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2024 on the severe situation of political prisoners in Belarus, 2024/2804(RSP), 19-Sep-2024.

³⁶ [2024-09-30-state-party-referral-lithuania.pdf \(icc-cpi.int\)](#)

³⁷ [Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC on receipt of a referral by the Republic of Lithuania | International Criminal Court \(icc-cpi.int\)](#)

³⁸ Statement: IAPB Welcomes Lithuania's Referral of Crimes Against Humanity by Belarusian Officials to ICC,
<https://iapbelarus.org/press-statements/>

³⁹ Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus | OHCHR established by the Human Rights Council on through resolution A/HRC/RES/55/27 of 4 April 2024

⁴⁰ Synergies include a consultancy and a training on linkage evidence.

⁴¹ In particular, by means of three goals and four strategic objectives (SO) (set out in Part 3), this project aims to achieve the following outcomes: The prospects for justice and accountability for serious international crimes and gross human rights violations committed by Belarusian authorities are increased through the preparation and filing of cases before criminal justice authorities, who investigate and prosecute them in accordance with the highest international standards (SO1 SO2 SO3). A survivor-centred approach is applied, so that Belarusian victims, witnesses and human rights defenders, who have been tortured or otherwise traumatized, are increasingly receiving effective medical, psychosocial and legal assistance, and met with a trauma sensitive approach, making them better positioned to provide information and evidence for purposes of accountability and redress (SO4).

⁴² <https://freedomlab.io/courses/trauma-informed-interviewing-skills-and-techniques-for-monitors/>