



## BELARUS PLATFORM SUPPORTS INCREASING NUMBER OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE AUTHORITIES AND THE UN

(30 January 2023) The International Accountability Platform for Belarus ([IAPB](#)) has made significant progress towards meeting requests for assistance from four states and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The IAPB continues to analyse and preserve thousands of files containing information and evidence on alleged crimes under international law committed in Belarus since 2020.

***“Investigations of international crimes can be extraordinarily complex, and require access to significant amounts of evidence. Increasing requests for assistance show how human rights organisations like ours can contribute to meeting these needs,”*** said Kate Vigneswaran, Head of the IAPB. ***“What is absolutely vital though is ensuring any support given is consistent with not just criminal justice standards, but survivor-centred approaches that minimise the re-traumatization of witnesses and at the same time ensure evidence is not contaminated.”***

The IAPB’s newly published [progress report](#) shows that, between February and September 2022, the IAPB provided the OHCHR examination of the human rights situation in Belarus (OEB) with access to its collection of materials, subject to informed consent. Since September, it has facilitated OEB’s access to over 140 victims and witnesses, as well as over 1,400 documents and open-source files relating to violations identified of interest by them. The IAPB and OEB continue to work together to share knowledge and identify continuing areas of support.

During the reporting period, the IAPB also received a request for assistance from the criminal justice authorities of another domestic jurisdiction, bringing the total number of states requesting assistance to four.

During the same period, the IAPB’s Belarusian co-leads, the Human Rights Centre “Viasna” and the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus (International Committee), collected witness statements, medical reports, court records and other materials from 857 survivor-victims and other witnesses, bringing the total to around 20,000 documents from to 2,052 survivor-victims and witnesses gathered by the IAPB so far. In addition, the IAPB has collected over 600,000 files from open sources, including more than 82,000 videos, 238,000 images and 159,000 text items from over 200 sources.

These materials are being analysed for the purpose of identifying survivor-victims and witnesses who may provide information and evidence to criminal justice authorities and the OEB, and to prepare analytical reports and other tools informing such bodies about crimes under international law allegedly committed in Belarus.

### *Mass arrests and torture*

- The progress report also notes how the human rights situation in Belarus has continued to deteriorate since the 2020 presidential elections. Mass arrests, detentions and prosecutions of persons on politically motivated charges continue to be the norm, with those released from detention continuing to allege they were subject to torture and other forms of mistreatment.

- ***“The human rights crisis deteriorated in 2022. We observe the normalisation of torture and ill-treatment, massive persecution of anyone suspected of dissident opinions and massive crackdown on all civil society organisations. 1,437 persons are recognised as political prisoners by Belarusian human rights organisations,”*** said Victoria Federova, Representative of IAPB co-lead, International Committee. ***“The decision of Belarus to denounce the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights leaves citizens of Belarus without any remedies for individual complaints about human rights violations at the international level.”***
- Among those held in detention are six members of Viasna, including the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize winner President Ales Bialiatski and board member Valiantsin Stefanovic, who were presented with new charges in September 2022 which attract an increased term of imprisonment of seven to 12 years. In November 2021, Viasna member and the head of the Center for Strategic Litigation, Leanid Sudalenka, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment; and Viasna volunteer Tatsiana Lasitsa was sentenced to two years and six months.
- Persons fleeing the country risk the appropriation of property they left behind and losing their citizenship, while being vulnerable to discrimination in third countries given Belarus' role in the conflict in Ukraine.
- ***“Next, we must be to try to build effective cases for specific perpetrators and to maximise the interests of victims and witnesses,”*** said Pavel Sapelko, Representative of IAPB co-lead, Viasna. ***“Protecting their rights is our top priority.”***
- In recognition of its contribution to the promotion of human rights in Belarus, Viasna was awarded the Clooney Foundation for Justice [Albie Award](#) in the "Justice for Democracy Advocates" category in September 2022 and its founder, Ales Bialiatski, the [Nobel Peace Prize](#) in October 2022. In January 2023, International Committee was awarded the [“Human Rights Campaign/Initiative of the Year 2022”](#) award by the Belarus human rights community, an initiative of the Human Rights Alliance founded in 2008.
- **Contacts:**
- (English) **Kate Vigneswaran**, Head of the IAPB; [kavi@dignity.dk](mailto:kavi@dignity.dk)
- (Belarusian/Russian) **Victoria Federova**, Representative, International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus (IAPB co-lead) and Head, Legal Initiative: [gomellawyer@gmail.com](mailto:gomellawyer@gmail.com)
- (Belarusian/Russian) **Pavel Sapelko**, Representative and Lawyer, Human Rights Centre “Viasna” (IAPB co-lead): [p.sapelko@gmail.com](mailto:p.sapelko@gmail.com)
- (Danish) **Jens Modvig**, Medical Director, Dignity (IAPB lead): [JMO@dignity.dk](mailto:JMO@dignity.dk)
- **About the IAPB**
- 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. It builds on the ongoing efforts of Belarusian human rights organisations to collect information about human rights violations committed in Belarus. More information about the IAPB can be found on [iapbelarus.org](http://iapbelarus.org). The IAPB is led by DIGNITY (Danish Institute Against Torture), the Human Rights Centre “Viasna”, the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus and REDRESS.