



## BELARUS PLATFORM ADVANCES ACCOUNTABILITY EFFORTS

(17 May 2023) The IAPB is advancing accountability efforts and justice for victims and survivors in Belarus, with information and evidence provided to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) having contributed to its recent findings that the human rights violations in Belarus may constitute crimes against humanity, a newly published [IAPB progress report](#) shows.

The [findings](#) from the UN High Commissioner, which were presented to the UN Human Rights Council in March, drew from interviews with 207 victims and witnesses and an analysis of over 2,500 documents. Of these, the IAPB facilitated access to more than 100 interviewees and 1,300 documents. In addition, the IAPB submitted documentation on 180 cases of sexual and gender-based violence, which the High Commissioner found to be credible, contributing to its finding that sexual and gender-based violence had been committed in Belarus.

The latest IAPB progress report also highlights that the platform is currently assisting criminal justice authorities in four states exercising or considering exercising universal or extraterritorial jurisdiction over crimes under international law allegedly committed in Belarus, ensuring that viable criminal cases are brought in the future to hold perpetrators accountable and deliver reparations to victims.

At the same time, the IAPB continues to grow its collection of information and evidence on alleged crimes under international law, preserving them in tailored-made digital archives, ensuring they will be readily accessible in the long term. During the reporting period (October 2022 – March 2023), the IAPB had already collected information and evidence from over 2,300 survivor-victims and witnesses located both inside Belarus and elsewhere, and over 750,000 open-source intelligence files.

As the UN High Commissioner noted in its findings, there is no reasonable prospect for justice for victims in Belarus, thus preserving this evidence is crucial. Rampant impunity for human rights violations continues, with Belarus' withdrawal from the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on 8 November 2022 coming into effect from 8 February 2023, preventing Belarusian citizens from reporting violations of the Covenant to the UN Human Rights Committee.

**Kate Vigneswaran, Head of the IAPB, said:**

*“The Belarusian authorities have not held one single perpetrator in Belarus accountable due to their lack of willingness. The only options for delivering victims justice lie in third states willing to investigate and prosecute, through UN human rights bodies and, for a more limited range of crimes, the International Criminal Court. Compared with the period in which the IAPB was established, the situation in Belarus has increased in complexity, with more violations of international human rights law and international criminal law that merit investigation. Increasing requests for assistance show that the IAPB can crucially meet these needs for assistance.”*

**Victoria Federova, from the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, one of the IAPB’s co-lead organisations, stated:**

“In interviews conducted with the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Belarusian survivors of torture highlighted the importance of documenting violations and of collecting and preserving evidence, which are essential for accountability processes and for future recognition of their status as victims. We will continue to collect evidence of crimes under international law, to support accountability efforts from criminal justice authorities and international mechanisms.”

**Pavel Sapelko, representative and lawyer from Viasna, another IAPB’s co-lead organisation, said:**

*“We have demonstrated the ability of human rights organisations to fill gaps in the existing mechanisms for collecting, consolidating, and preserving evidence for the future prosecution of those guilty of crimes against humanity. We will firmly stand at the forefront of the struggle to preserve the truth about the brutality of the Belarusian authoritarian authorities who lost the elections, supporting legal accountability efforts and advancing the fight against impunity regardless of borders. Not only dictators can be strong, but also the democratic forces that defend and promote the principles of human rights.”*

More than two years after the August 2020 presidential elections, the human rights situation in Belarus has significantly worsened. Currently, at least 1,495 political prisoners languish in prison, including the leadership of Viasna, Chair and Nobel Prize laureate Ales Bialatski and Deputy Chair Valentin Stefanovic – who were sentenced to ten and nine years' imprisonment respectively for their human rights work in March. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, allegedly supported by Belarus, has worsened the situation for Belarusians inside Belarus and elsewhere.

In his [most recent report](#), released in May, the OSCE Moscow Mechanism rapporteur on Belarus noted the need for the international community “to support initiatives aimed at reporting and documenting human rights violations in Belarus, and notably the work of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus.” The IAPB shared information and evidence that it has gathered with the rapporteur, including open-source documents and confidential sources on individual cases, which the rapporteur found “highly reliable”.

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#### **About the IAPB**

The [IAPB](#) is an innovative civil society platform that collects, preserves and analyses information and evidence of serious human rights violations constituting crimes under international law allegedly committed in Belarus in the context of the August 2020 presidential election and its aftermath, with the aim of supporting accountability bodies and ensuring Belarusians and other survivors have access to remedies and reparations. Since April 2021, the IAPB has collected information and evidence of torture, rape and other acts of sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial killings and other inhumane acts committed by state actors in Belarus, which may constitute crimes against humanity. The IAPB collects information and evidence from victims and witnesses both inside and outside Belarus, providing them with access to information and to referral pathways for mental health and psychosocial support irrespective of their location.

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](#).

The IAPB’s mandate is supported by the European Union and states including Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the USA. Recognising the importance of the IAPB’s work, the IAPB’s mandate, which started on 24 March 2021, was extended in 2022 until September 2023.

In recognition of its contribution to the promotion of human rights in Belarus, Viasna was awarded the Clooney Foundation for Justice [Albie Award](#) in September 2022 and its founder, Ales Bialiatski, the [Nobel Peace Prize](#) in October 2022. In January 2023, the International Committee was awarded the [“Human Rights Campaign/Initiative of the Year 2022”](#) award.