



THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMITTEE
FOR INVESTIGATION OF
TORTURE IN BELARUS

**STATEMENT
UPR Pre-session on Belarus
Geneva, August 29, 2025
Delivered by: Legal Initiative**

1. Presentation of the Organisation

Legal Initiative is a Belarussian non-profit human rights organization established in 1996, now operating in exile. It works on human rights education, legal aid, legislative reform, and international advocacy. Its special project – the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus (ICITB) – launched in 2020, co-leads the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, documenting and preserving evidence of crimes under international law since the 2020 presidential election.

2. National consultations for the drafting of the national report

Belarusian authorities held no consultations with independent civil society. Human rights groups work in exile, while many defenders face persecution. The ICITB and other initiatives are banned and labelled “extremist formations.”

3. Plan of the Statement

This statement will address two issues: (1) prevention of torture and independent investigations, and (2) criminalization of torture in national legislation.

4. Statement

I. Prevention of torture and independent investigations

A. Follow-up to the previous review

During the 3rd UPR cycle, States recommended ending torture, ensuring impartial and independent investigations, release arbitrarily detained persons, including political prisoners, holding perpetrators accountable. None of these recommendations have been implemented due to a clear lack of political will.

B. New developments since the last review

Following the 2020 protests, around 5,000 complaints of torture and ill-treatment were submitted to Belarusian investigative bodies. All were dismissed without initiating criminal proceedings.¹ No senior official has publicly condemned torture or warned that perpetrators would be held accountable; instead, official statements have endorsed law enforcement actions. OHCHR has established that by May 2021, some 37,000 persons had been arrested and detained in Belarus in the context of the election, including around 13,500 between 9 and 14 August 2020. These mass detentions, accompanied by unlawful force, torture (including sexual violence), and other ill-treatment, aimed to stifle dissent and were carried out in a widespread and systematic manner under official policy, warranting further assessment under international criminal law.²

As of August 2025, there were 1,180 recognized political prisoners in Belarus, including 178 women. Over 2,800 others have been released since 2020, bringing the total number of current and former political prisoners over 4,000³. More than 1,900 testimonies confirm systematic and widespread torture since August 2020.

Detention conditions remain far below international standards: overcrowded, unsanitary cells without privacy or bedding; constant light and night checks used as “sleep torture”; limited showers; and prolonged SHIZO confinement in harsh, cold cells with severe movement restrictions. Political prisoners face psychological pressure, threats, and disproportionate disciplinary measures⁴.

Belarus has no independent bodies with unannounced access to detention; monitoring commissions are government-controlled, restricted in mandate, and exclude human rights defenders.

C. Recommendations

1. Conduct prompt, thorough, effective, and impartial *investigations into all acts of torture and ill-treatment* committed in the post-election period since August 2020, and ensure that all perpetrators, including those in positions of command, are held accountable.
2. Establish an *independent national mechanism* with the mandate to receive complaints, conduct prompt, thorough, effective, and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, in full compliance with the Istanbul Protocol and international human rights standards.
3. Grant *independent national and international monitors* unrestricted access to all places of detention, including police station holding cells, temporary detention centers, pre-trial detention facilities, labor treatment centers, security service detention centers, administrative detention units, medical and psychiatric detention facilities, and prisons.

II. Criminalization of torture in national legislation

A. Follow-up to the previous review

States previously recommended amending the Criminal Code to define and criminalize torture in line with the Convention against Torture and to ratify its Optional Protocol. These recommendations have not been implemented.

B. New developments since the last review

¹ CAT/BLR/6, p. 119, 123

² A/HRC/49/71, p. 85, 86

³ [https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/list?view=1&status\[\]=0](https://prisoners.spring96.org/ru/list?view=1&status[]=0)

⁴ A/HRC/52/68, p. 18

Despite *eight* Criminal Code amendments since 2020, torture is still not defined as a separate crime. Article 128 applies only to large-scale crimes; Article 394(3) covers only investigative or judicial personnel. Other provisions (abuse of power, bodily harm) downplay the gravity of torture, hinder statistics, and prevent adequate penalties.

Investigations are conducted by the Investigative Committee, which reports directly to the President, including when its own officers are implicated. No independent mechanism or special unit exists. Officials accused of torture are not suspended during investigations, enabling pressure on victims. Judicial oversight of detention is absent: prosecutors, not judges, authorize pre-trial detention, often without meeting detainees, and courts rarely investigate torture claims or order medical exams.

C. Recommendations

1. Amend the Criminal Code to include a specific provision *criminalizing all acts of torture* in full compliance with the Convention Against Torture.
2. Amend the Criminal Procedure Code to require that allegations of torture by defendants are fully, promptly, and impartially investigated before criminal proceedings continue, ensuring that no evidence obtained under torture is admissible in court.
3. Revise the Criminal Procedure Code to ensure judicial, not prosecutorial, authorization of pre-trial detention, with mandatory hearings attended by the accused, prosecutor, and defense counsel within a set short time frame (e.g., 48–72 hours from arrest).