# TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT IN BELARUS: LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEGAL REFORM

## ABOUT LEGAL INITIATIVE

**Legal Initiative is a non-profit human rights NGO defending rights in Belarus since 1996.**

LEGAL INITIATIVE

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR INVESTIGATION OF TORTURE IN BELARUS

## Areas of Expertise

- Human rights education
- Legal assistance to victims
- Legislative reform and change in law enforcement practices
- International advocacy

Our special project – **International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus** – launched in 2020 with Belarusian and international partners.

We co-lead the **International Accountability Platform for Belarus**, documenting and preserving evidence of crimes under international law since the 2020 election.

## TORTURE AND IMPUNITY IN BELARUS

Follow-up to UPR: during the 3rd UPR cycle, States urged Belarus to end torture, ensure independent investigations, release political prisoners, and hold perpetrators accountable — none fulfilled.

## CURRENT SITUATION

- **5,000+** torture complaints since 2020 — all dismissed.
- By May 2021: **37,000** arrests, incl. **13,500** in first 6 days post-election.

**As of Aug 2025:**

- **1,180** political prisoners (178 women)
- **4,000+** current & former political prisoners since 2020
- **1,900** testimonies confirming systemic torture

**Detention Conditions:** overcrowding, filth, no bedding/privacy; "sleep torture" via constant light & night checks; limited hygiene; prolonged solitary in freezing cells. Political prisoners face threats, psychological pressure, and excessive punishments.

**No Independent Oversight:** monitoring bodies are state-controlled, restricted in mandate, and exclude human rights defenders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Investigate** all acts of torture and ill-treatment since August 2020 promptly, effectively, and impartially — holding all perpetrators, including those in command, accountable.

**Establish** an independent national mechanism to receive complaints and investigate torture in full compliance with the Istanbul Protocol and international standards.

**Grant** unrestricted access for independent national and international monitors to all detention facilities.

# CRIMINALIZATION OF TORTURE IN NATIONAL LEGISLATION

Follow-up to UPR: past recommendations to amend the Criminal Code to define and criminalize torture in line with the Convention against Torture, and to ratify OPCAT, remain unimplemented.

## CURRENT SITUATION

- Despite 8 Criminal Code amendments since 2020, **no separate torture offence exists.**
- Existing articles are narrow, downgrade severity, hinder statistics, and weaken penalties.
- Investigations handled by President-controlled Investigative Committee, incl. cases against its own staff.
- No independent investigative body.
- Prosecutors — not judges — authorize pre-trial detention; hearings without detainee presence are common.

LEGAL INITIATIVE

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR INVESTIGATION OF TORTURE IN BELARUS

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Amend** the Criminal Code to criminalize all acts of torture in full compliance with CAT.

**Amend** the Criminal Procedure Code to require full, prompt, impartial investigation of torture allegations before proceedings, excluding any evidence obtained under torture.

**Revise** the Criminal Procedure Code to ensure judicial — not prosecutorial — authorization of pre-trial detention, with mandatory hearings within 48–72 hours of arrest.

**Website:** legin.info
**Instagram:** @legal_initiative_belarus
**Email:** lirngo@gmail.com

**Website:** torturesbelarus2020.org
**Instagram:** @torturesbelarus2020
**Email:** contact@torturesbelarus2020.org