



© NATALIA KOLESNIKOVA/AFP via Getty Images

NEWS

24 January 2025

Belarus: Authorities hold presidential election in climate of total fear and repression

Amnesty International calls on the Belarusian authorities to immediately end their vicious campaign of repression against any dissent, which denies the people of Belarus free speech in the run up to the presidential election scheduled for 26 January.

“Ever since the 2020 presidential election, the already profound human rights crisis in Belarus has deepened even further. Through a brutal campaign against all dissent, the authorities have created a suffocating climate of fear, silencing anything and anyone who challenges the government,” said Marie Struthers, Amnesty International’s Eastern Europe and Central Asia Director.

“The systematic use of repressive measures, including arbitrary detentions, torture and other ill-treatment, and effective criminalization of critical speech, paints a bleak picture of the state of human rights in Belarus today.”

““

The systematic use of repressive measures, including arbitrary detentions, torture and other ill-treatment, and effective criminalization of critical speech, paints a bleak picture of the state of human rights in Belarus today

“It is shameful that the international community has largely allowed the human rights crisis in Belarus to unfold and fade into the background. While attention is drawn elsewhere, thousands of people in Belarus remain imprisoned, tortured, or silenced simply for expressing their opinions. Governments and international organizations must act decisively to seek an immediate end to this ongoing crisis and hold the Belarusian authorities accountable for it.”

Widespread repression

Since the mass protests following the disputed 2020 presidential elections, Belarusian authorities have unleashed a relentless crackdown on dissent. Peaceful protests have been met with unlawful force by police and other law enforcement services.

According to Belarusian human rights monitors, over 50,000 individuals have gone through arbitrary detention for taking part in or being associated with peaceful protests since 2020, with 6,550 prosecuted and convicted, and 3,697 given custodial sentences. Many were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. At least seven political prisoners have died in detention since 2021, five of them in 2024 alone. These deaths were avoidable and are the result of the conditions of detention and inadequate medical care.

This campaign has only intensified in the lead-up to the 2025 presidential elections, with the authorities targeting dissenting individuals and groups across all sections of society, directly and via their relatives.

The abuse of anti-extremism legislation has become the cornerstone of the government’s strategy to suppress dissent. As of late 2024, 6,565 online resources, from personal social media accounts to independent media outlets and international news organizations, had been arbitrarily labeled as “extremist.” Individuals face severe penalties including hefty fines, for any association with these entities.

Human rights defenders have been particularly targeted, with 93 arbitrarily detained since 2020, including veteran human rights activist, Nobel peace prize laureate Ales Bialiatski. Hundreds of activists, civil society leaders and at least 45 media workers are currently behind bars, and countless more have faced fabricated charges, forcing many to flee the country.

BELARUS	CENSORSHIP AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION		DETENTION	FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION	
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT	NEWS	PRESS FREEDOM	PRESS RELEASE	PRESS RELEASE	
PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE	TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT		UNLAWFUL DETENTION		