

# MASS TORTURE IN BELARUS 2020

**Third interim report:  
torture, cruel,  
inhuman and degrading  
treatment of women**

INTERNATIONAL  
COMMITTEE  
FOR THE INVESTIGATION  
OF TORTURE IN BELARUS

**The International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus was created as a reaction of Belarusian and foreign human rights organizations to torture and brutality towards civilians after the presidential elections on August 9, 2020.**

### **The Committee's objectives**

1. Documenting torture, brutality, use of weapons and special equipment against civilians.
2. Searching for witnesses and evidence of torture.
3. Identification of suspects in torture and inhuman treatment.
4. Processing of the information received.
5. Preparation of lawsuits and legal support of torture victims.
6. Communications with and appeals to international organizations.
7. Preparation of reports on the collected information for the general public of Belarus, as well as for international organizations and institutions.
8. Interaction with governmental, non-governmental actors, for example, national and international courts, the Investigative Committee, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Belarus.

### **Principles of the Committee**

The activities of the Committee are based on the [Principles of Activity of Human Rights Defenders of Belarus](#). In addition, for this purpose, we adhere to and emphasize the following in our work:

- confidentiality of information and security for its members;
- interaction of all stakeholders;
- work according to unified methodology and concentration of information in a single database.

## **The Committee's members include**

1. RPO "Legal Initiative"
2. Human Constanta
3. Center for the Promotion of Women's Rights "Her Rights"
4. Ukrainian Helsinki Spilka for Human Rights
5. Public Association "Link"
6. PU Belarusian Documentation Center
7. Human Rights Center "Legal Assistance to the Population"
8. Community organization Thruth Hounds
9. Charitable organization VostokSOS
10. Association of Ukrainian monitors in respect of human rights in the activities of law enforcement agencies
11. Human Rights Center ZMINA (Ukraine)
12. World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)
13. Moscow Helsinki Group

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## General conclusions

The main escalation of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment by the law enforcement took place on August 9–13, 2020 throughout Belarus. Violence against peaceful demonstrators continued by the authorities until the end of 2020 and in January 2021.

By applying direct violence to women (as one of the vulnerable groups) — participants in peaceful actions and allowing various forms of inhuman and degrading treatment of human dignity, ignoring the special needs of women in places of detention, representatives of the state carried out both a direct violation of national legal norms and obligations of the state under international treaties.

The general trend shows that there was less **physical torture against women** on August 9–13 than against men, however, the percentage of women detained at rallies on these days is much less.

**Medical assistance** was not provided to women, or was provided in few cases.

**Sexual violence against women** occurred almost everywhere and at different stages of interaction with representatives of the law enforcement: at the time of detention, transportation to places of detention, in places of detention, in places of serving sentences.<sup>1</sup>

**Delivery to penitentiary institutions and conditions of detention there** do not comply with international standards and national legislation and constitute torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the [Hague Principles on Sexual Violence, Declaration of Civil Society \(2019\) p. 7–10](#), proceeding from the main characteristics of a wide range of acts that can be equated with sexual violence, sexual violence includes single, multiple, continuous or recurrent acts, which in the context are perceived by the victim, the perpetrator as sexual in nature, including causing someone to reasonably fear or fear acts of sexual violence; denying someone access to hygiene, treatment or medication related to menstruation; behavior by the performer that, in the circumstances, could be construed as offensive, derogatory or intimidating. Fundamental is the fact that these acts, equated to sexual violence, were carried out by representatives of the state.

The state does not react to the complaints filed with the prosecutor's office about the conditions of detention and continues the deliberate practice of creating cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions for women in places of detention.

Not a single criminal case on torture allegations has ever been opened.

Numerous acts of violence applied to women during their detention, as well as during their delivery and keeping in places of detention, due to their massiveness, fully fall under the jurisdiction of Art. 128 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (crimes against the safety of humanity), and also violate the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The provisions of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Rules of Nelson Mandela) are violated in all places of detention, namely the female wing of the prison must be in the authority of a responsible officer of the female sex, no male officers should be allowed in the women's section unaccompanied by a female gender employee, women should also be supervised by female staff.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to these norms, men often carried out personal searches of detained women.

In most cases, the following United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) are not followed by the state:

- newly arrived women prisoners shall be provided with facilities to contact their relatives; access to legal advice; information about prison rules and regulations, the prison regime (Article 1 of rule 2);
- provision of personal hygiene products for women, including during menstruation (rule 5);
- if the existence of sexual abuse or other forms of violence before or during detention is diagnosed, the woman prisoner shall be informed of her right to seek recourse from judicial authorities. The woman prisoner should be fully informed of the procedures and steps involved. If the woman prisoner agrees to take legal action, appropriate staff shall be informed and immediately refer the case to the competent authority for investigation.

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<sup>2</sup> Section 81 of the [Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners \(The Nelson Mandela Rules\)](#).

Prison authorities shall help such women to access legal assistance. (part 1, subparagraph (e) of rules 6);

- if the existence of sexual abuse or other forms of violence before or during detention is diagnosed, the woman prisoner shall be informed of her right to seek recourse from judicial authorities. The woman prisoner should be fully informed of the procedures and steps involved. If the woman prisoner agrees to take legal action, appropriate staff shall be informed and immediately refer the case to the competent authority for investigation. Prison authorities shall help such women to access legal assistance. (Article 1 of rule 7);
- provide women prisoners with gender-sensitive health care at least equivalent to community-based health care (rule 10, Art. 1);
- instead of strip searches and invasive body searches, use alternative search methods (rule 20);
- providing protection, support and advice to women prisoners in reporting abuse and investigation by a competent and independent body (Art. 1 of rule 25).<sup>3</sup>

The aforementioned violations, as well as the threats of sexual violence noted by a large number of women interviewed at all stages of being under the control of law enforcement, cynical assessments by male guards of the appearance of female prisoners and the characteristics of female physiology, emphatically accentuated insults of them as women, refusals to issue personal means of personal hygiene and other similar actions indicate a gross violation by the state of the provisions of Art. 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which Belarus is a party.<sup>4</sup>

The arguments of the official authorities that by suppressing peaceful demonstrations in the form of arrests and fines, they are acting in accordance

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<sup>3</sup> [United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders \(Bangkok Rules\)](#) .

<sup>4</sup> Article 2 prescribes that “The states parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue a policy of eliminating discrimination against women without delay by all appropriate means and undertake to: d) refrain from committing any discriminatory acts or action against women and ensure that public authorities and institutions act in accordance with this commitment”.

with the Law on Mass Events and the Code of Administrative Offenses,<sup>5</sup> are untenable, since, according to the Joint Conclusion of the Venice Commission and the OSCE / ODIHR “On the Law on Mass Events in the Republic of Belarus”, as well as a number of decisions of the UN Human Rights Committee, the said law does not comply with the provisions of Art. 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which establishes universally recognized standards of freedom of peaceful assembly.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.belta.by/incident/view/mvd-za-narushenie-zakonodatelstva-o-massovyh-meroprijatijah-11-sentjabrja-zaderzhany-32-cheloveka-406485-2020/>

<sup>6</sup> With the jointly opinion of the Venice Commission and ODIHR №FOA-BEL / 201/2012 — 655/2011 of 17.03.2012, “On the Law on Mass Events in the Republic of Belarus”.



# Methodology

This report covers the period from August 2020 to February 2021. It is based on in-depth interviews with 143 women victims of torture and other actions of law enforcement officials (riot police (OMON), Ministry of Internal Affairs, penitentiary officers, etc.). The report is based on these interviews conducted by the Committee, as well as information from open sources, data obtained from partners, witnesses of human rights violations, as well as during the monitoring of peaceful assemblies.

The report includes an analytical analysis of data on the detention of women, being in places of detention (District departments of internal affairs of Minsk and other cities) and delivery to places of detention (Center for Isolation of Offenders, Temporary Detention Centers, Pretrial Detention Centers).

# August 9-13, 2020 in Belarus: torture, violence, humiliation

## DETENTIONS

The main escalation of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of human dignity took place on August 9–13, 2020 throughout Belarus. As a general trend, it can be seen that the number of torture against women was less than against men, however, the percentage of women detained at the protests on August 9–13 is significantly lower.

The beginning of detentions, including of women — independent observers, took place at polling stations both on the day of the main voting, and immediately after the closure of polling stations at 20:00-21:00. A lot of people came there to look at the voting protocols posted by the election commissions.

If in the afternoon of August 9, the detentions at the polling stations were more or less correct, then with the onset of the evening they were detained more severely. In the evening, people were detained by unknown persons in uniforms without identification marks, in masks and balaclavas, while the men were beaten with truncheons. Nobody introduced himself or explained the reasons for the arrest. Women who tried to demand unidentified law enforcement officials to introduce themselves and comply with the law were brutally grabbed and thrown into minibuses.

For any demand to find out about the legality of actions on the part of the law enforcement, there were the following phrases: “You shouldn’t go out”, “I’m not your defender.” Why did you go out? Do you have a bad life, or what?” etc. and all these in obscene language.

In minibuses, in front of the women, men who had already been detained and did not resist were being beaten.

The epicenter of the beginning of the massive use of stun grenades, gas, rubber bullets and violence from the law enforcement was the monument “Minsk —

Hero City”: the intersection of Masherov Avenue and Pobediteley Avenue. The main clean-up began at about 22:00–22:30, when the law enforcement arrived with shields and helmets. Eyewitnesses say about targeted fire to the crowd. The female witnesses saw a militia van run over a man. They started shouting “they killed a man”, then they were gassed.

At the same time, on Kalvariyskaya street near the Korona shopping center, in a traffic jam formed due to road blockages, riot police officers simply smashed cars with or without white symbols with truncheons. Several women testify that they were hiding from the law enforcement in the bushes at the intersection of Timiryazeva and Kalvariyskaya streets and tried to get home, while the law enforcement indiscriminately fired rubber bullets at the bushes. After that, the clean-up began, everyone ran across the bridge, and the law enforcement fired at them in the back. Law enforcement officers started to grab people.

At the same time, in the city center, the law enforcement completely blocked traffic, people were seized and kept in buses for several hours without explanation and without the opportunity to visit the toilet. Thus, a citizen of the Russian Federation was detainé'd near the circus at 32 Nezavisimosti Ave. at about 21:00. They did not react to statements that she is a citizen of another country. When asked to introduce themselves, they said: “We are nobody”.

In one case, women who were kept in buses near Nezavisimosti Avenue, accompanied by law enforcement male officers, were taken to a nearby courtyard, where they went to the toilet in the bushes in their presence. There is also a known case when a woman was forced to urinate right in the bus in front of law enforcement male officers, they did not respond to her requests to take her to the toilet.

In the regions at the same time, both protesters and bystanders were detained. For example, in Molodechno, a random couple was detained. The riot police began to beat her husband, who fell after five blows. In Brest, a woman was detained at the intersection of Gogol Street and Sovetskaya Street. First, they sprayed gas in her face, she fell, and she was beaten by two riot police officers, who were wearing balaclavas. The blow to the head was so strong that she was subsequently diagnosed with a closed head injury. Nobody paid attention to requests for medical assistance either during the arrest or while in places of detention.

On August 10–13, detentions of women had continued.

Detentions were practiced in order to examine telephones for the presence of photographs and videos of protests. Everyone who had such materials was immediately detained. Those who did not unlock the phone were also detained. Some women were simply detained on the street after 11 pm, while noting that they were “particularly dangerous” or “protest coordinators”.

So, on August 11, at about 11 pm, a woman stood at a traffic light and talked on the phone. A traffic militia car and a minibus with security officials drove up, they got out and grabbed the phone. As soon as they saw the photographs of the events of August 9, she was immediately detained and told that she was especially dangerous. During the search of her personal belongings, she was examined by male security officials.

Some women were accused of regulating traffic as a justification for their detention. A sufficient reason for the arrest was the presence of a person at a gathering place for protesters, for example, the Pushkinskaya metro station, a Riga supermarket, etc.

At the same time, some law enforcement officials groundlessly stated that a curfew had been imposed in Minsk and that one should not go out into the street.

Women providing medical assistance to protesters and identifying themselves or vehicles with a red cross caused great aggression. Detaining cars marked with a red cross law enforcement officers accused them of helping protesters, which served as an additional incentive for aggression and humiliation. From the stories of the victims: “as soon as they saw the crosses in the car, they seemed to have some kind of ecstasy, such inspiration: ‘Oh, doctors!’ Well, they just began to cry out so joyfully — ‘Get out!’ ‘You are animals, cattle, scum’”.

## **DELIVERY TO PLACES OF DETENTION**

Almost all of the respondents testify about humiliation during detention, delivery to militia departments (district departments of internal affairs) and to places of detention (CIP, temporary detention center, pre-trial detention center). Many report threats of sexual violence. Against the background of obvious lawlessness and mass torture of men, all women perceived these threats realistically. Almost all the detainees were ordered to look down and not raise their eyes so as not to see the faces of the law enforcement. From the testimony of the victim: “I raised my head anyway, then they took me by the head and pressed me

straight into the hood of the car with my face, and then I became very scared that I could be raped and something else, because I didn't know what to expect in that moment".

Some women were beaten in paddy wagons. Additional aggression was caused by women citizens of other countries. Thus, when a citizen of the Republic of Lithuania was brought to the militia station, an OMON officer said: "Ah! You're Lithuanian. And in there is feminism in Lithuania. Well, then you will be beaten like everyone else," and four times hit the shoulders and head, and this was repeated several times.

Many were transported in paddy wagons in separate compartments ("glas-ses" — designed for 1 person) by 2–3 people. All the detainees testify to a lack of oxygen — the women were suffocating, at least four of the respondents had panic attacks and bouts of claustrophobia. One girl began to cut her hand with a key, as she could not bear being in a closed, narrow and dark space without oxygen.

Some of the detained women were driven with their hands tied behind with handcuffs or ties, on their knees, with their faces on the floor. Moreover, when the paddy wagon was driving along the road, then any turn, bumps on the road or a stop brought them unbearable physical suffering.

Additional psychological suffering for the women was caused by the beating of their spouses by the law enforcement. From the testimony of the victim: "“You should sit at home, cook borscht, why are you going out? And you, in general, came up with the idea or with the herd?” She: ‘I came with my husband’. ‘Oh, you have a husband here too. Let's get a divorce. Fuck such a husband. He's here?’ ‘Yes’. He asked her to show him and demonstratively in front of her eyes slapped him in the face three times”.

## **STAYING IN PLACES OF DETENTION (RUVD, ROVD)**

Many detainees were taken to the sports halls of militia departments. Some women were handcuffed or tied with plastic ties behind their backs in places of detention, despite the fact that no one offered resistance or tried to escape from the militia stations. Many were ordered to kneel face down on the floor. Being in this position, even for a short time, is very painful.

Some women were not taken to the toilet for quite some time, even when they asked for it themselves. Everyone was forbidden to raise their eyes and look at those who beat the detainees. Those women who were in the cells of the militia department were forced to urinate either directly on the floor or in turn into a plastic bottle.

According to the testimony of the victims, medical assistance was not provided to many, the requirements for medical assistance were ignored, even for seriously injured people.

From the testimony of the victim: “And here is the boy, whom I could just see with my peripheral vision, she [the militia officer] beats him ... At first, he shouted, then he stopped shouting. I hear voices from behind, saying, ‘He's already unconscious’. Someone else says: ‘Well, then finish with him and pull out’. They still begin to beat him with truncheons, then they dragged him out of the gym. People just asked to call a doctor, they asked for medical help. This was not even discussed. It made them even more angry”.

Some of the girls were beaten in the militia department on a par with the guys. From the testimony of the victim: “I don't know why they didn't like me, when they brought me to the militia department, probably everyone came up and hit me with a truncheon. Moreover, for nothing”.

In one ROVD, an OMON officer marked the girl with a black marker: wrists, chest and forehead, she was very scared and wet herself, as there were threats of rape. From the story of the victim: “We were told: ‘You are bitches, you are creatures, you shouted ‘shame’ to us, we will all rape you in turn’”.

An additional psychological violence against women was the brutal torture of guys in front of them. From the stories of the victim: “The guys were bullied. They just killed every guy. The guys were screaming, they just couldn't, they didn't have the strength. I couldn't hear it — I thought that I would lose my mind, it was impossible”.

Almost all women were required to sign the protocols without reading them. When they refused to do so, they were threatened, insulted, or humiliated. From the story of the victim: “When I said that I didn't know what I was signing, that I wanted to read, what I was signing, the answer was ‘Shut up, creature. Sign, otherwise it will be worse’”. As a result of the threats, the victim was forced to sign the protocol without reading it.

## **STAYING IN PLACES OF DETENTION (CIP, IVS AT AKRESTSINA STREET)**

The center of mass torture on August 9–13 was the Center for Isolation of Offenders on the lane. Akrestina, 36 (TsIP). All victims, without exception, testify to the mass torture on August 9–13, 2020 at the CIP, used both by the riot police in the courtyard and by the CIP officers in the institution itself.

The cells designed for 4 people and about the size of 12 m<sup>2</sup>, were filled by 35–50 people, an average of 4 per 1 m<sup>2</sup>. People were suffocating, some had panic attacks, some fainted due to lack of oxygen. Many women tried for a long time not to go to the toilet, as there was not enough oxygen anyway. From the story of the victim: “The door opened, and already on the threshold of the cell it was clear that there was no air in the cell. There were already 23 girls in the cell, it was a cell for four. It was 3 by 4 meters in size, there were already 23 girls there. We were brought in, and in total there were 36 of us. I don’t know how we got in, because on the threshold I didn’t know how to get in”.

When there was a lack of oxygen, people asked to open at least a door, or a hole in the door for distributing food (“feeder”), in order to give access to at least a small amount of oxygen. In response to any requests or complaints, the CIP staff would open the door and pour out a bucket of water or a bucket of water with bleach. From the story of the victim: “On the second day we were transferred to the second cell, where there were 37 of us, without food, without water, when we began to resent, they poured water with bleach. We were resenting because we were suffocating, water ran down the walls from condensation because there were so many people. It was torture. We asked to open the feeder. They just opened the doors and poured water with bleach, it was done by the same person”.

From 9 to 12 August, people were not fed at the CIP. Only on August 12, food parcels from volunteers were delivered to some cells. They drank water from the tap or from one bottle. The water that was taken from the tap, which in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is very dangerous for detainees and does not meet any hygiene norms and standards. From the stories of the victims: “We were not fed all this time, that is, we were not fed even once for 2,5 days in Akrestina Street, only on the day when we were transported to Zhodino we were given 9 loaves of uncut bread for 36 people”, “We all drank from the same bottle, because it is difficult to move around the cell, there we lie in a crowd on top of each other, sit, stand. And the more you move, the more oxygen you take, the more you interfere with each other. It is impossible to breathe, food was not given, we could drink only from the tap”.

There was no toilet paper in the cells; requests to bring it were ignored in every possible way. From the story of the victim: “Then they put me in a cell, when we asked for toilet paper, they said: ‘Wipe yourself off with T-shirts’”.

Even people with diabetes were not given medication. No medical assistance was provided. From the stories of the victims: “We called a doctor, my mother said: ‘I need to drink pills, I am a type 2 diabetic, my pills are in my bag’. To which the doctor said: ‘I’m not a pharmacy, goodbye’, — closed the feeder and went away”, “They did not give food for three days, my mother had diabetes, she started screaming that she would soon die, they answered: ‘We don't give a shit, you shouldn't go out’”.

In one cell at the CIP, women were held together with a woman who was allegedly suffering from acute psychosis or delirium tremens. She was delirious, violent, did not allow anyone in the cell to sleep, pulled the doors and put her hands into the feeder, which angered the employees of the CIP. The women in the cell were told “calm her down, even kill her, no one gives a shit”.

Women were subjected to psychological abuse when they heard the screams of men who were brutally tortured in the courtyard and in the premises of the CIP. From the story of the victim: “I could hear screams and obscene language from above and below. ‘Welcome to a tolerant country, animals!’, ‘Prepare your ass, now I will rape you with a truncheon!’” “They were beaten up demonstratively. How? The following way, they took the guys out, actually put them near the doors of the women's cells and just beat them. And you sit, and all that you hear is blows with a truncheon, groans, screams, until the person just shuts up and stops screaming”, “A girl sat upstairs, looked out the window and she saw, and we heard how the guys were taken out, how they are beaten, how they are beaten in the street, screams”, “In fact, the brain cannot cope with this, with this powerlessness, when you hear people being beaten and it destroys your personality so that you immediately obey, well, in general, it just breaks your brains, as they say, and in this cell you could neither sit, nor stand, nor go to the toilet”.

Some women were beaten and threatened with rape by CIP officers. From the stories of the victims: “On August 12, they took me to the first floor to get my things, an employee approached me who was beating people on the 12th. She strangled me from behind, started to beat me on the kidneys with her fist and ankle boots in the groin, my legs were blue. ‘Did you have a nice walk with a white ribbon, bitch!’”, “He came up to me and began to whisper in my ear that if do not obey, they will mutilate me and ruin my appearance, and that they will rape me altogether, and he will make me sit on a bottle. For the first time in my life, I experienced such animal fear. It's just inside you everything grows cold,



you stand and understand that, perhaps, these are your last minutes of life, it is not known what will happen. I already imagined all this in my head, how they will rape me altogether, and I had a panic attack”, “If you do not start taking off your personal things and laces, then I will beat you so badly, that no one will recognize you, I will be slapping you in the face until you lose your human form. I told him: ‘Would you say the same to your wife?’ And he said that you are not my wife, and my wife does not hang out in the streets. After that, he slapped me in the face with his palm”, “They spoke very ugly with the girls that your ass is cool, if the girls answered something, and they were like ‘We are going to rape altogether right now!’”

The special needs of women for personal hygiene products were not met. Some of the women had their periods, the CIP staff said “dry yourself with your T-shirts” or “we can't help you at all”.

All victims testify that they have been insulted and humiliated. From the story of the victim: “The girls were called whores. They called them creatures. They said something like why didn't you stay at home to fry your cutlets, you need it?! They humiliated honor and dignity in all sorts of different ways”.

The women were not allowed to read the protocols on an administrative offense, that is, they could not know what they were accused of. From the story of the victim: “The girls who were standing next to me, at the moment when they wanted to read the protocol, they simply pulled it out of their hands and said: ‘Go back to the cell, we took you to sign the protocol, and you are doing bullshit’”.

The relatives of the detainees were not informed about the arrest. In connection with the disconnection of the Internet and the daily shelling and explosions in Minsk, as well as a large number of detained and wounded citizens, relatives experienced severe moral suffering due to ignorance of the fate of their relatives, who disappeared.

## **September 2020 — January 2021 in Belarus: discrimination, torture, violence and humiliation against women**

In September–December 2020, the practice of using violence against citizens who participated in peaceful protests in Minsk and other cities of Belarus continued in the Republic of Belarus.

The most numerous marches during the period under review took place on Sundays. In almost all of them, militia officers beat people, including women, with truncheons, used pepper gas and firearms with rubber bullets, water cannons.

Women took an active part in peaceful gatherings. In September 2020, their participation, like that of young people (students), has become more noticeable. On September 5, 12, 19, 26, women's marches were held in Minsk: several thousand women in white dresses, with flowers began to go out to separate actions, demonstrating their peaceful nature. In fact, only on the first march there were no mass arrests.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, at least 100 women were detained at each of them.

The women also took part in other peaceful meetings that took place on September 6, 13, 20, 27. Detentions also took place on marches in October, November, December. Among the detainees were bystanders, journalists during the performance of their professional duties.<sup>8</sup>

In September, women, students and youth came to the fore, with the advent of the “pensioners march” older people became more visible. The ratio of the percentage of participation in peaceful assemblies of men and women was almost equal. There was a predominance, but not a dominance of the age group 25–40 years old; in general, all generations were represented in the protests. The

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<sup>7</sup> <https://belaruspartisan.by/politic/521422/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/716934.html?>

activity between Minsk (about 50%) and the regions was approximately equally divided. The predominance of people with higher education is noted.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the data received, we state that during the peaceful protests in the period September 2020-January 2021, there was the use of violence by law enforcement agencies (the state), against women, torture and equivalent conditions of detention in places of detention.

## **PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

### **During detention and transportation**

Almost all of the respondents say that violence was used against them or that they witnessed violence, primarily physical. In front of their eyes, there were severe beatings of men during the arrest, already detained and beaten men who were with them in the transport without any need. In order to inflict severe pain on them, they again beat them with truncheons and legs.

So, victim M. told about the detention of her and her 22-year-old son on September 13. “People scattered, and the riot police chased them and beat them with truncheons. Everyone was shouting, it was scary, I have not seen anything like this. Shock”. The woman was hit in the chest, she could not breathe, she fell (later she was diagnosed with a severe chest contusion). Further, almost literally: “... the son was knocked down with a blow of a truncheon, he was lying. The son did not resist, lying down, raised his hands, the riot policeman pressed him to the ground, others ran to him. I was scared that they would still beat my son. And then I went to him, I don’t know how, I walked, crawled ... I then hugged my son with my arms, hugged him from above. And she started screaming. I didn’t recognize my voice: ‘don’t touch my son, don’t hit ...’ We were lifted and dragged into the paddy wagon ...”.

The victim K. was in the peaceful column, OMON were walking behind. Suddenly the OMON ran up to them and started indiscriminately simply pulling out the latter and beating them with truncheons. She was given 3–4 blows, one of which hit her on the head, and she started bleeding. The victim went to the hospital. She

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<sup>9</sup> <https://belaruspartisan.by/politic/524414>

notes that in the following days she felt bad psychologically, could not sleep, collect her thoughts. Now she is visiting a psychotherapist.

Victim N., 60 years old. On November 8, at the end of the march, two buses stopped in the area of Nemiga Street, OMON officers jumped out of it and began to grab people. On the sidewalk there was a woman with an icon and a poster "God sees everything". They tore out an icon, a poster, threw them on the ground, and hit the woman. In the paddy wagon on the 2nd step there was a white-red-white flag, they were forced to step on it. In the paddy wagon, one of the OMON officers insulted her and brandished her with a truncheon. Then she and the other women were transferred to another paddy wagon, where they were placed in a "glass". It was designed for three people, they were herded there in nine. Further, pepper gas was applied to them twice. The detainees coughed and gasped.

Many women also testified that they were not allowed to go to the toilet while being transported in paddy wagons.

### **Conditions of detention in internal affairs departments**

Almost all those detained by the riot police and other law enforcement (men and women) were initially taken to the militia. All interviewees noted an extremely difficult psychological state caused by violence against the detained men who were next to them, as well as the appearance of the victims, who had visible traces of beating.

The victims noted that the officers of the district departments of internal affairs rarely used physical violence, everything was limited to jolts, single blows to those persons who, in their opinion, behaved incorrectly. Violence, unreasonably, actively and massively used by riot police officers, took place with the tacit consent and non-intervention of employees of the regional departments of internal affairs.

On September 13, the victim S. was detained together with her son and taken to the Frunzenskiy district militia department. At the entrance there were riot police officers with machine guns. The detainees were forced to leave with their heads down, insulted: "You are nobody, call you nobody. You are not people, just wordless creatures. They put them facing the wall". Their leader chose young people and hit them.

On September 26, the detainees, mostly girls, were placed in the garage of the Leninsky District Department of Internal Affairs, a small room with stone walls, one of which is missing, where it was very cold. They were there for several hours.

On October 18, those brought to the Leninsky District Department of Internal Affairs were placed in the same unheated garage, facing the wall. They stood facing the wall, hands behind, legs apart from 3 pm to 4 pm until 1 am (10 hours).

On November 8, at the Central District Department of Internal Affairs, the detainees were in the corridor on the 1st floor, also facing the wall. When arriving people began to lack space in the corridor, they had to stand in the cold outside for several hours. Both men and women were in this position.

Thus, in violation of the Rules of Detention of an Individual, in respect of whom administrative detention was applied, citizens brought to militia bodies were often kept in places and conditions that were not adapted for this, and therefore they were inflicted additional mental and physical suffering.

In spite of the fact that in many militia departments were detained for ten hours or more, food and drinking water was not provided to them. Subsequent placement in the temporary detention facility and the CIP, as a rule, in the evening and at night, also led to the fact that people continued to be left without food. The water was generally allowed to be drunk from the tap when a person was taken to the toilet, but it is not purified drinking water.

In the Leninsky District Department of Internal Affairs, according to the testimony of the detained K., militiamen gave the a five-liter canister. One of the detainees had a glass, everyone drank from it. Sharing one glass during the COVID-19 pandemic poses a danger to the health and life of detainees.

In none of the Minsk militia department, where the detainees were massively delivered, the responsible persons didn't comply with even the minimum anti-epidemiological measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The detainees, being in close proximity to each other, were not provided with masks, they were kept crowded for several hours or more. It was noted that some of the militia officers who communicated with the detainees were also without medical masks.

### **Facts of psychological and sexual violence**

The detained women noted an extremely high degree of psychological and sexual violence on the part of militia officers (shouts, foul language, humiliating insults, threats, including rape).

Detained A. testifies that on October 11 in the Frunzenskiy district department of internal affairs they (women) were threatened, but not beaten. They shouted “to spread their legs, otherwise (obscene) — they will hit”.

Also, one of the detainees on November 8 testifies that when they were brought to the Sovetskoye District Department of Internal Affairs, they were taken out of the paddy wagon, chanting and laughing: “Now we will rape them”, “Fresh meat has arrived”, insults sounded (“whores”, “witches”) ... According to the victims testimonies, some riot police officers offered to meet, claiming that they already knew the phone number.

Victim K. October 26 was in the Frunzenskiy district militia department of Minsk. She testifies: “They brought in three more guys, each of them had a White-Red-Whitw flag wrapped all over their faces up to their throats, wet and dirty. It looks like they were being dragged right through the mud, face down. Three of them were seated separately and forced to lower their heads very low and not take off these flags, that is, they sat like this, wrapped in these flags, and I don't know how they breathed there. Nightmare. And now the hands, too, behind their backs, their heads down, and they were addressed very harshly. They brought two guys. They have such wounds on their faces everywhere, and they both limped, just pulled one leg behind them”.

### **Failure to notify relatives of the detention and location**

Everywhere detained women note that they were deprived of the right to inform their relatives about their whereabouts.

Daria was detained at the exit from work. In the Tsentralny district militia department of Minsk, she was denied a call to her relatives. She heard that the officer on duty was talking on the phone with her relatives, who asked if she was in the department. The employee asked her for her last name. Having received confirmation that it was about her, he answered into the phone that there was no such person here. Then he laughed and said: “Apparently, they are already looking for you”.

Such actions are not only a violation of the law, but also cause the detainees and their relatives moral suffering, because in the conditions of mass detentions and the use of violence, the fate of their loved ones is unknown to them for a long time.

### **Failure to provide medical care**

As a rule, the decision to provide medical assistance was subject to the arbitrary discretion of the militia officers. In a number of cases, medical assistance was provided out of time or was refused at all, despite visible injuries.

On September 13, Olga, among others, was beaten, received a severe blow to the head; the militia department did not call an ambulance for her, despite requests. Doctors diagnosed her with a closed craniocerebral injury, concussion and eye contusion.<sup>10</sup>

Ksenia said that on October 25 in the militia department the detainees stood facing the wall for 2–3 hours. She fainted, hit her head hard on the concrete floor. Despite requests, an ambulance was not called for her.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://belaruspartisan.by/politic/521422/>

# **Conditions of detention of detainees in places of administrative arrest IVS, CIP, SIZO in Zhodino**

## **TEMPORARY DETENTION FACILITY (IVS) IN AKRESTSINA STREET. CONDITIONS OF DETENTION**

When the detained women were brought from the district militia department to Akrestsina Street, the women were placed in so-called “glasses”, the size of which was 1 m<sup>2</sup> for up to several hours (from one to three hours on average). As a rule, 4–5 people were placed in a “glass”. After all administrative and other procedures, the women were placed in a cell. In addition to the fact that the very existence in such conditions was extremely difficult for women, caused panic and fear, crowding and lack of protective measures threatened the life and health of those detained in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The injured women stated that their mattresses were taken away from them, they were not given blankets, and they were not allowed to close the window at night, despite the fact that it was very cold. The linen that was given out was washed, but full of holes and shabby, more than one pillowcase and one sheet was not given. Blankets, pillows and mattresses were not properly sanitized, they smelled of urine, and they were dirty. There were also lice in the cells. “You put this pillowcase on, you understand that you are praying to all the gods that there would be no lice and ticks. Most likely, it was all there”.

According to the testimony of the victims, medical assistance was not provided to the proper extent. When asked to call a doctor, the women were told “it's easier to kill than to cure”. For example, one of the respondents explained that she was not provided with medical assistance for a broken finger. Others said that they were not provided with the medications necessary for normal functioning (for diabetes, thyroid problems, hormonal imbalance).



The women were monitored by video cameras 24 hours a day. In order to see what was happening inside the cell, a searchlight was always on in the cell, even at night — bright enough to read and interfere with sleep.

One of the cells in IVS, according to the detainees, was dirty and smelly, the toilet did not work. They very often stood at the window, because the cell smelled so badly, there was nothing to breathe. It was also very cold.

The IVS officers constantly harassed and humiliated women, threatening to shoot them. In some cases, physical violence was used. For example, one woman, for pressing the red button, was strongly grabbed by the IVS officer by the hand, pushed, simultaneously speaking in an obscene manner.

One of the detainees on September 26 said that when they were brought from the militia department to Akrestsina Street, they sat in the paddy wagon for about an hour. Some of the detainees asked for help: some had their periods, others wanted to go to the toilet. One girl was given a plastic bottle to go to the toilet. Another was given a pad, but with comments: “Look, now she will smear herself with this blood, then she will say that we had beaten her [obscene]”.

## **CENTER FOR ISOLATION OF OFFENDERS ON AKRESTSINA STREET (CIP)**

Based on information from the women interviewed, as a rule, women were transported to Zhodino on Wednesday. Thus, women were left without parcels for at least another week, since Wednesday is the day of passing parcels.

It can be concluded that this was done to create more unbearable conditions for the detainees. Restriction of parcels is illegal: neither the PIKoAP, nor the Rules for the detention of an individual, in respect of whom administrative detention has been applied, approved by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus dated November 21, 2013 No. 996 (hereinafter — Rules No. 996), nor the Rules of the internal order of places of serving administrative arrest approved by the Resolution of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus dated October 20, 2015 No. 313 do not impose restrictions on the number of parcels or the establishment of certain days for passing them.

The detainees were taken to the shower extremely rarely: once during the entire period of their stay in the CIP (from 10 to 15 days), as well as there was no hot water in some cells, and therefore the women washed themselves in the cell with cold water. Men took the women to the shower. “At first they turned on

only cold water, and then at the end they turned on hot water, they probably had a minute for hot”.

Also, the CIP administration did not take measures to eliminate lice in the cells and to adequately supply women with lice remedies: “The nurse gave a very small bottle after repeated requests. The next day, my head was still itching and I asked for another bottle, to which I was told that I had already been given. They refused me: ‘It's only your nerves’”. The distribution of food was also not followed by sanitary standards, despite the coronavirus and the presence of lice. The employees were without masks and without gloves.

Infrared video cameras also functioned in the CIP chambers for 24 hours. When trying to cover the camera with clothes, the CIP officer demanded to open it.

Women were also taken out for walks extremely rarely — 2 times in ten days. At the same time, according to Rules No. 996, detainees who have been subjected to administrative detention for a period exceeding 12 hours should be given the opportunity to take daily walks for at least two hours.

Some women also note the lack of personal hygiene products — soap, toothpaste, toilet paper, sanitary napkins. At the same time, women note that many simply did not know about such a possibility: “Apparently, we made them very angry then. Since we didn't know about it, and even now we cannot make a complaint to them, they say, ‘why didn't they ask?’ We didn't know. ... Most likely, it was a punishment.

Despite the actual availability of hygiene products in the CIP, thanks to the help of the Belarusian Red Cross Society, they reached the addressees only at the personal discretion of the CIP staff.

The well-known basketball player Elena Levchenko, who was detained on September 30 and taken to Akrestsina Street, said that her mattress was taken away from her. People slept on bare bunks for the remainder of 13 days, which made their backs hurt. After that, the flush in the toilet and hot water were turned off in the cell. She also got lice. When Elena told the head of the CIP Yevgeny Shapetko about this, he said: “This is all done so that you do not want to come back here”. Thus, the head of the CIP admitted that such inhuman conditions are being created deliberately.

The well-known Belarusian model and TV presenter Olga Khizhinkova, who was detained on November 8 (her term in detention was 42 days in a row), said that it was cold in the cell due to the shutdown of the heating, they had to put on all the things they had, then without any explanation, employees took the mattresses. Olga was not provided with personal hygiene products (toothpaste, brush, lice

shampoo). A woman was put in her cell, presumably with the experience of homelessness and alcohol addiction, who started having problems on this basis — epileptic seizures, delirium tremens. Such conditions were created deliberately to aggravate her presence in the CIP. People, presumably with the experience of homelessness, were used as objects to create inhuman living conditions for Olga.

Since January, the CIP stopped accepting parcels for prisoners, but for the necessary medications, “in order to ensure safety and reduce the risks associated with the spread of COVID-19 in the Republic of Belarus”, in this regard, people cannot get clean things, hygiene products and food. Thus, the state created even more inhuman conditions of detention for detained people.<sup>11</sup>.

## **TEMPORARY DETENTION CENTER IN ZHODINO (IVS)**

The women say that on September 11, when they were transported from Akrestsina to Zhodino, it lasted for about 4 hours, but the women were not taken to the toilet.

According to the testimony of the victims, “as soon as we arrived in Zhodino, we walked along the corridors in a column, then the officer said to walk squatting, if someone stopped or slowed down, they shouted rudely. One woman had problems with joints, she was allowed to walk normally with the following wording: ‘Okay, you walk normally, but because of you, everyone will walk to the end in this position’”.

According to the testimonies of the respondents, at the entrance to the Zhodino IVS there was a flag on which all the detainees had to step. One of the women tried to bypass it, then the riot police officer hit her. One of the employees threatened to cancel the court decision if the women did not sing the anthem of Belarus. Thus, people were forced to compromise their values, views, principles through the threat of the use of physical force (having a monopoly on violence and a sense of impunity).

Women also mention other forms of psychological violence and threats against them. According to one of the detainees, the guard asked everyone: “Does something hurt?” He was wearing a balaclava. Then he approached one of the women and asked her: “Does something hurt?” She says, “No”. He: “So it will hurt”.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://people.onliner.by/2021/01/14/na-okrestina-vtoruyu-nedelyu-ne-prinimayut-peredachi>

According to the testimony of the victims on September 26, when they were brought to Zhodino, psychological pressure immediately began in an obscene form: “Hands behind your back, head down! Now I’ll raise them for you, I’ll make you a swallow”. After the expiration of the period of stay in Zhodino, one of the detainees received a kick from an officer.

In the IVS in Zhodino, there was also a practice when, with women stripped naked while being searched, male officers entered. From the testimony: “When an employee walked me in, there was already a naked woman standing there. When I was getting dressed, the employee knocked, but immediately entered. That is, this knock did not make sense”.

According to the testimony of the respondents, in the Zhodino IVS there was such a form of psychological pressure as turning on the loud music on the radio.

On September 4, several detained women in the cell wrote statements of refusal to eat — they handed them over to the employees of the Zhodino IVS, the application was accepted without registration, they did not bring food to the women, but upon release they issued an invoice.

In the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, only 4 cups were given to the cells for eight during each meal. As a result, the threat of coronavirus infection increased.

In one of the cells, the toilet also did not work, according to the detained on September 4, it immediately clogged up. “You had to go straight into this hole with your hand and punch everything that stuck there”. They reacted negatively to requests to fix the toilet.

It was impossible to use the toilet in the cells in private. The women who had to go to the toilet apologized to the others because the ventilation was very poor and they were ashamed. Some of them delayed physiological needs: “I was able to delay a serious trip to the toilet for up to 6 days. I didn’t even know that the body can do that”.

Moreover, when the women went to the toilet, the IVS officers could open the door to the cell. The women were guarded only by men and only men came to them too.

According to the testimony of the victims, in order to smoke, the IVS officers demanded to do 100 squats and then the detainees were given cigarettes.

Many testify to the overcrowding of the cells upon delivery and before the trial - for example, in November there were 18 people in one four-bed cell. There were no mattresses or bed linen in the cells. There were cockroaches in the cells.

They were rarely taken to the shower. When the detainees asked to take a shower on the sixth day, the staff of the Zhodino IVS answered them: “It is not allowed. This is punishment”. The women were taken to the shower by men who entered the premises without any warning and before all the women had time to wash and get dressed (women were given 10 minutes to shower). At the same time, in the door to the shower there was a peephole through which it was seen how the women were washing. From the woman's testimony: “We made it in time. But there is no clock. Other girls told me that if they didn't manage to meet this time, the guards simply opened the door, and those who did not have time to get dressed could be led into the cell in their underpants”.

According to the testimony of the victims, medical assistance was not provided properly and out of time: three women were given one jar of drops for a cold, enough for one spray for each, at a body temperature of 39–40 degrees, the doctor walked for more than an hour and a half, gave the sick no-spa and paracetamol. Neither fluorography nor X-rays were prescribed or performed, which during the COVID-19 pandemic is a threat to health and life. Many women went out after serving their sentences sick, including coronavirus.

These actions of the employees of the detention center are not provided for by the PIKoAP and internal regulations No. 313 and constitute torture and inhuman treatment of detainees.

## **Women over 60 years old in places of deprivation of liberty**

During the period considered in the report, human rights defenders recorded 34 cases of serving an administrative arrest from 10 to 27 days under administrative articles of women from 60 to 68 years.<sup>12</sup>

All women who have served administrative arrest suffer from chronic diseases (up to oncological diseases), they need periodic medical supervision, taking medications, and a food diet appropriate for the diseases. In the conditions of places of detention and serving of sentences, none of these instructions is fulfilled and cannot be fulfilled. The situation is complicated by the critical epidemiological situation in connection with the spread of COVID-19 in places of detention and serving sentences (Akrestina, Zhodino, militia departments), failure to provide medical assistance to detainees, refusal to transfer, lack of clean drinking water. This age group is very vulnerable to COVID-19 and doctors record a large percentage of deaths in this age group. Staying in places of detention for women over 60 is torture and cruel, inhuman treatment.

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<sup>12</sup> Information from open sources and testimonies of the victims themselves.

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001739407636>

## Recommendations to the state

1. Stop the practice of reprisals against women for the realization of human rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
2. Stop physical and psychological violence against women.
3. Unambiguously condemn torture at the highest state level and warn law enforcement officers about criminal responsibility for all acts of torture.
4. Take legislative and other measures for the immediate implementation of Art. 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
5. Bring prison conditions in line with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (The Nelson Mandela Rules), the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (The Bangkok Rules ).
6. Bring the conditions of detention in places of detention in accordance with sanitary and epidemiological standards, as well as provide detainees with adequate medical care, hygiene items and protective equipment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. Prevent all cases of psychological, physical and sexual abuse of detainees in places of detention, and to examine the facts of violence and bring to justice those responsible for the use of violence against detainees and creation of inhuman conditions of detention.