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BELARUS

STOP EXECUTION OF TWO YOUNG BROTHERS

On 22 May, the Supreme Court of Belarus upheld the death sentences of young brothers Stanislau and Illia Kostseu, aged 19 and 21 respectively. They have appealed to President Lukashenka for clemency. The President has granted clemency only once since coming to power in 1994. If clemency is denied, Stanislau and Illia Kostseu will be executed imminently.

There is no doubt that the murder, for which they were convicted, is a serious crime. Both young men have expressed their deep regret and cooperated fully with the criminal investigation. Stanislau and Illia Kostseu are the youngest prisoners to be sentenced to death in Belarus in over ten years. Their execution would be a terrible stain on Belarus' record.

The death penalty has been abolished in law or practice in every country in Europe and Central Asia, except Belarus, although there is a clear and welcome commitment from Belarus to join its neighbours and the global trend towards abolition.

With international attention currently on Belarus, granting clemency to Stanislau and Illia Kostseu would be a clear signal of Belarus' meaningful intention to end this practice. It would also give these very young men the opportunity to turn their troubled lives around and show that rehabilitation and reform is possible.

Please send a fax or email, otherwise a letter, to the president.

- * Urge him to grant clemency to Stanislau and Illia Kostseu.
- * When deciding on their fate, ask him to take into account the ages of the two brothers, the stain on Belarus, and the flagrant violation of the rights to life, to security of person and to freedom from cruel, degrading treatment.
- * Call on him to make history by granting clemency to Stanislau and Illia Kostseu and by commuting their death sentences to terms of imprisonment.

Write to

President of Belarus Alyaksandr Lukashenka
Vul. Karla Marksa, 38
220016, Minsk
Belarus

Fax: 011 375 17 226 0610 or 011 375 17 222 3872

Email: contact@president.gov.by

Salutation: Dear President

Please copy

Mr Evgeny Russak
Chargé d’Affaires, Embassy for Belarus
350 Sparks St, Suite 908
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7S8
Fax: 613 233 8500
Phone: 613 233 9994 or 613 232 0255
E-mail: canada@mfa.gov.by

Human Rights Centre “Viasna” working with the Kostseu family
Email: viasna@spring96.org

Additional information

This case has shocked many in Belarus and the international community given the young ages of Stanislau and Illia Kostseu and the difficult circumstances of their upbringing. Their father died when Stanislau Kostseu was only a few months old, leaving their mother struggling to bring up her children. Their older sister, Hanna, often acted as their primary carer. This case is the first time in over ten years in Belarus that such young men have been sentenced to death and the first time ever that two members of the same family are facing execution.

While the government of Belarus continues to state that it is moving towards abolition of the death penalty, this case is a shocking reminder that, in practice, the system remains essentially intact. Before their trial, President Lukashenka publicly stated: "They're scum, there's no other word for them. They have been in trouble before and have been punished." The President’s personal intervention in the case at an early stage may have influenced their conviction, in a country where serious concerns about the independence of the judiciary remain.

Presidential elections in Belarus are scheduled for 9 August. There is already a huge crackdown on freedom of expression and assembly in the country, targeting opposition candidates, their teams and supporters, protestors, journalists and activists, which is drawing internal and international attention and criticism.

If clemency is denied, Stanislau and Illia Kostseu will be executed soon after. Neither they nor their family will be told the date or time of their executions or be granted a final meeting. Prisoners on death row in Belarus are executed by a shot in the back of the head, after only minutes’ notice. This can take more than one bullet. Their family will learn of their executions only weeks later and will not be given their bodies for burial or told of the location of their graves.

Amnesty International and other organizations have called repeatedly for an end to the secrecy surrounding the death penalty in Belarus and recorded its devastating impact on the families of executed prisoners. For the Kostseu family, this trauma is made more unbearable given it is two very young brothers facing execution.