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BELARUS

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER, NASTA LOIKA FACES CRIMINAL CHARGES

Belarussian human rights defender, Nasta (Anastacia) Loika is facing unfounded criminal charges after serving almost 75 days in detention for purported petty hooliganism. Nasta Loika, an educator, remains in detention.

The authorities are targeting her in retaliation for her human rights work which focuses on human rights violations resulting from the use of the repressive “anti-extremist” legislation in Belarus, the protection of foreign nationals and stateless persons in Belarus.

There are serious concerns for her safety, health and wellbeing. Nasta Loika must be immediately released.

Write to the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Belarus urging him to:

- Ensure Nasta Loika’s immediate and unconditional release and end the misuse of the criminal justice system to target her and other human rights defenders in Belarus.
- Instigate an immediate investigation into the allegations of Nasta Loika’s torture and other ill-treatment, and into her arbitrary detention and prosecution.
- Suspend any officials who may be reasonably suspected of respective violations until the outcome of the investigation.
- Ensure that all those responsible are held accountable in fair trial proceedings without recourse to the death penalty.

Write to:

Andrei Shved
Prosecutor General of the Republic of Belarus
Internatsiyanalnaya Str., 22
Minsk, 220030
Republic of Belarus
Email: info@prokuratura.gov.by
Twitter: @prokuraturaby

And copy:

Charge d’Affaires
Mr. Pavel Shidlovsky
Embassy of Belarus
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Washington, DC 20009
Email: usa@mfa.gov.by
Twitter: @BelarusEmbUSA

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Nasta (Anastasia) Loika is a prominent human rights defender and educator, focusing her work on human rights violations resulting from the use of the repressive “anti-extremist” legislation in Belarus, the protection of foreign nationals and stateless persons in Belarus, and on human rights education.

Nasta Loika was arbitrarily detained on September 6, 2022 as she was leaving the Minsk City Court after attending a court hearing in the trial against fellow human rights defenders Marfa Rabkova, Andrei Chapyuk and their eight co-defendants. They were handed lengthy prison sentences on fabricated charges. On September 7, 2022, Nasta Loika was sentenced to 15 days in detention, purportedly for “petty hooliganism”, a violation under Article 19.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences. On September 22, 2022, the Frunzenski District Court of Minsk sentenced her again to 15 days in detention under the same Article.

During her detention Nasta Loika was denied access to her lawyer and denied necessary medical treatment and basic necessities, including warm clothes and drinking water. She was released on October 6, 2022, after serving her sentence.

However, on October 28, 2022, Nasta Loika was again arbitrarily detained in Minsk and sentenced on October 31, 2022 to 15 days in prison under the same charges of “petty hooliganism”. Shortly after her arrest, a “confession video” featuring Nasta Loika appeared on a Telegram channel believed to be linked to the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption, a structure of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs that has been regularly used by the Belarusian authorities to crack down on political opposition and all dissent in the country. Numerous human rights violations by its officers have been reported in recent years. The Belarusian authorities have repeatedly used video “confessions” extracted under duress from arrested government critics and activists.

Nasta Loika was not released after serving her 15-day sentence on November 12, 2022, and allegations of “petty hooliganism” were again brought against her. During the online hearing, Nasta Loika reported that she had been tortured with electric shock during questioning and that she was left for eight hours in the courtyard outside without outerwear. She felt ill as a result of the cold temperatures. The prison authorities were refusing to deliver parcels to Nasta Loika with medicines, personal hygiene products and warm clothes that she urgently needs.

On December 24, 2022, after five 15-day detention terms, criminal charges were brought against Nasta Loika: under Article 342.1 (“Organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order, or active participation in them”) and 130.3 (“inciting racial, national, religious or other social enmity or discord”).

The basis for the latest accusation was Nasta's alleged participation in the writing of a report on the persecution of members of anarchist groups in Belarus in 2018. The report provides a critical assessment of the activities of police officers, which the investigators have qualified as “inciting enmity” against police officers as “a professional group”, an “extremism” related charge. This is yet another example of the blatant criminalization of human rights work by the Belarusian authorities.