

Monitoring report on the repressions against priests and believers

The regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka continues to persecute priests and believers of various faiths for their civic stance, condemnation of violence and war of Russian against Ukraine. The number of detentions of the priests and believers is growing, and now churches, temples, different places of worship are being confiscated from the believers.

The current monitoring report contains multiple cases of such violations of the right to freedom of conscience and freedom of belief in Belarus in 2020-2022.

In this monitoring report we indicate only the cases of repressions against those who have a rank of priest or is a minister of religion, a religious figure, and also against those who just participated in a church service or in a religious ceremony. **73** such cases have got into this monitoring report, over **110** people were affected. They include **4** women serving in churches and not less than **20** women parishioners.

This monitoring report also registers repressions against the St. Symon and Alena (the Red) Church and the Christian Social Center in Minsk, as well as repressions for one spiritual song.

Courts claimed **fin**es in the cases stated in this monitoring report for the sum of **112 thousand 792,5 Belarusian rubles**. At least **28** resonant cases of **dismissal, removal from office and forcing the resignation** are known. Also, this monitoring report registers **396 days of arrest**. Currently, **97,5 years** of total penalty for **12 people in the form of imprisonment** have been confirmed. **Six more people** are waiting for trial and probably even longer terms of imprisonment. Practically all defendants in these cases, convicted to imprisonment or staying in a pre-trial detention facility, have been recognized as **political prisoners**.

The right to freedom of conscience and freedom of belief is violated in Belarus at all levels: from access of priests to prisoners in jails to repressions against priests for praying and last rites for the deceased that for some reason were disliked by the regime while they were alive.

We will list some characteristical repressions and infringement of the right to freedom of conscience and freedom of belief in Belarus:

1. mass-scale denial of access of priests to incarcerated people as a method of pressuring the prisoners. Priests are often not allowed to those who are in pre-trial detention and even to those already convicted and in prison. For example, the famous Belarusian oppositionist Pavel Seviarynets was able to see a pries after the rial had pronounced the sentence, but the political prisoners Viktor Siadou and Artsiom Bayarski were denied a visit of a pries by the judges hearing their cases. The political

prisoner, philosopher Uladzimir Matskevich, a Calvinist in his beliefs, was denied a visit of a protestant pastor. The Catholic Mikita Yemelianau had to go on hunger strike to protest that he was not allowed to have a visit of a priest. The case was highly publicized, and the Bishop Aliaksandr Yasheusky managed to visit Mikita. At least **30 cases** of infringement of the rights of believers in the form of denial the opportunity to see a priest of their religious communities are known.

2. **The administration of pre-trial detention facilities and prisons do not allow to send the Bibles, prayer books and other religious literature to the inmates.** For example, only in October, 2020, the Catholic books sent to three political prisoners – **Maksim Znak, Dzmitry Furmanau and Eduard Palchys** were returned to the senders. Similarly, in November 2020, the administration of the pretrial detention centre № 1 of Minsk **returned 42 out of 70 New Testaments**, sent by an activist to political prisoners.
3. Cases have been recorded where enforcers **cut religious ornaments and crosses from the necks of the detained people.** Although the Internal regulations of the correctional institutions in Enclosure 3, p. 17 allow the convicts to have with them sacred objects not made out of precious metals, Mikita Yamialianau, serving his sentence in Mogilev prison N.4 was deprived of the rosary given to him by the Assistant Bishop of Mogilev Archdiocese, Aliaksandr Yasheuski, during his pastor visit. Besides that, political prisoners are not allowed to participate in funerals of their close relatives. Thus, Pavel Seviarynets, serving his sentence in the correctional prison N. 17 (Shklov) was not given permission to participate in the funeral of his father Kanstantsin Seviarynets, died on October 1, 2021, from the coronavirus infection. Therefore, the hindrance of religious life of convicts in prison colonies is a very serious problem.
4. Creation by the KGB of Belarus of the **list of disloyal priests of different confessions.** For example, **On June 10, 2021**, according to the information, provided on the social media, the leadership of the Belarusian Orthodox Church submitted to the 4th Main Directorate of the KGB a list that consisted of approximately **100 “disloyal” priests.**
5. Confiscation of a Catholic church from the believers for the support of the protestors. Since the beginning of October, 2022, the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka has conducted actions that are aimed at taking the St. **Symon and Alena (the Red) Church** from the believers. During the protests 2020, the church was a refuge for a lot of protesters who hid there from arrests by the police operatives and possible torture, and it was place where the believers came to pray for peace and victory of the good. The Belarusian regime is taking revenge over people for following their Christian tradition and terminate the contract of use of the Red church with the community “Roman-Catholic parish of St. Symon and St. Alena”. The church leadership received a corresponding communication.

Also, this report contains cases of pressure on the priests of the Red church for their commitment to Christian principles:



The priest Uladzislau Zavalniuk, the Abbot of the Red church in Minsk, was forced to pray on the steps of his church. He was not let inside. By the way, over 30 years ago, at the beginning of the post-Soviet times, the priest Uladzislau in the same way prayed near that church asking to return it to the believers.



On October 11, 2022, the police tried to arrest the priest Uladzislau Zavalniuk and the parishioners who attempted to pray near the church. The enforcers pushed the parishioners away from the church both physically and emotionally, forcing them to disperse.

6. **On August 30, 2022**, it became known about the decision of the regime to close the school of the **Christian Social Center in Minsk**. That educational institution is similar to an after-school recreation center, or a private school, or a kindergarten in the form of its work. **The Christian Social Center** is a religious organization, accountable to the Catholic Church in Belarus. It contains a chapel, living quarters for priests, as well as a private Catholic school. However, not only children from Catholic families came to study here. The school had worked since 2018, tens of children of pre-school and school age studied there. All kinds of children were accepted there, Muslims and atheists included. It was forbidden to change one's confession at the school.

7. **We want to emphasize separately, that hierarchs of the national level were also subject to pressure from all side and often stood up to defend the basic rights of their congregation.**



On September 17, 2020, Metropolitan Pavel, at the time the head of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, visited people injured by OMON (the riot police). Although officially he underlined that the Orthodox Church is outside politics, empathizing with sufferings of people, the Metropolitan prayed about the sufferers. In the result the public activity of the head of the

Belarusian Orthodox Church cost him his post, and being a citizen of Russia, he had to leave Belarus.



One of the most standout cases was the denial to enter Belarus to the Catholic Archbishop **Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz**, then-head of the Catholic Church in Belarus, which happened **at the end of 2020**. It was a reaction to his active position and appeal to the regime to have a dialog with the society, his condemnation of violence and appeal to free all political prisoners. Upon his return to Belarus, the Archbishop Kondrusiewicz offered Pope Francis

his resignation. After it had been accepted, the Catholic Church became more tolerant to the repressions in the country.



On August 31, 2022, the priest Uladzislau Bahamolnikau was brutally detained at his home after a search. Already on September 1, 2022, the Orthodox priest was sentenced to 14 days of arrest, however he was not released on September, 14, but was taken to the police to execute another administrative detention report Thus, he was given other 15 days of arrest. The next day after the second trial, the priest Bahamolnikau had one more trial and was sentenced to one more 15-day arrest. Without being released he got 15 days of arrest more again. He **was supposed to be released on October 29, 2022**, but on **October 28 he had the fifth trial and was sentenced to the fifth arrest**, this time for 15 days. **Thus, in**

total he has been subject to 74 days of arrest. The priest got sick on COVID-19 during

detention, the detention conditions at the delinquents’ detention centre in Okrestina lane of people known as “political detainees” are very hard: they are not allowed to receive parcels, they lack basic hygiene products. On the regime's Telegram channels threats were published that the priest may be detained for several months or that a criminal case will be opened against him.

Uladzislau Bahamolnikau is a cleric of the parish of the Epiphany Church in Minsk of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, a member of the Diocesan Court of the Minsk Diocese, Professor of Philosophy at Minsk Theological Academy He served a litany for Raman Bandarenka at the Square of Changes and announced a hunger strike in solidarity with the political prisoner, the journalist Ihar Losik. For his civic stance, the priest was fired from his position of the Professor of Philosophy by the academic council of the Minsk Theological Academy. One of the regime's channels informed that a criminal case was opened against Behemolnikau under Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code (Formation of extremist groups or active participation in such).



In December, 2020, Abbot of the parish of Saint Jehoshaphat Kuntsevich in Rasony (Vitebsk region), priest **Viachasalu Borok** was sentenced to 10 days of arrest for “propaganda of the Nazi symbols”: in August, 2020 he posted an anti-fascist poster of the famous Belarusian artist Uladzimir Tsesler “Stop lukashism”, in which the Hitler swastika was composed out of the official flag and symbol of Belarus. The priest Bortok considers this persecution to be political. Later he had to move to Poland to avoid seizure of his technical equipment and deprivation of access to communication channels

that he uses to preach. The Rasony district police opened a criminal case against Viachaslau Bortok under the article about violation of the order of organization or execution of mass gathering events.



On December 1, 2020, the Abbot of the Church of Saint Archangel Michael in the agricultural town of Stepanka, Zhabinkovsky district (Brest region), 53-year-old **Siarhei Rezanovich**, was detained in the framework of the high-profile Autukhovich case. His wife, Liubou Rezanovich, who once owned a taxi service, same as Mikalai Autukhovich, and their son Pavel, who worked in

the Division for Compulsory Enforcement of Leninsky district of Brest, were detained as well. During the court hearing, Pavel Resanovich filed a complaint about physical and emotional torture used against him to force him sign the testimony prepared in advance. When the judge asked him, why he had signed the documents despite being graduated in jurisprudence, he replied: “The KGB operatives were threatening me of arresting my wife, and in the corridor, they were holding and beating my mother, and I heard her screams. In such conditions you will sign everything.” The trial was held in Grodno prison, the family were accused of terrorism and sentenced to huge terms of imprisonment. Siarhei Rezanovich was sentenced to **16 years in a maximum-security correctional facility** and to a fine in the amount of 19 thousand 200 Belarusian rubles, and his wife Liubou Rezanovich - to 15 years of imprisonment in a medium-security prison and also to a fine in the amount of 19 thousand 200 Belarusian rubles. Their son Pavel Rezanovich was sentenced to **19 years of imprisonment in a maximum-security correctional facility** and to a fine in the amount of 25 thousand 600 Belarusian rubles. All defendants in the Autukhovich case were summarily sentenced to almost 200 years of imprisonment.



In November, 2020, the Press Secretary of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, **Siarhei Lepin**, was forced to resign. He condemned the destruction of the national memorial to Raman Bandarenka, killed during the protests. The Chairman of the Synodal Information Department of the Belarusian Orthodox Church Siarhei Lepin received a warning from the Prosecutor-General's Office for his statements on Facebook.

To support the archpriest Siarhei Lepin, **69 acting priests** turned to the Metropolitan Veniamin. In solidarity with the Archpriest Siarhei Lepin, also the employee of the Synodal Information Department **Tatsiana Kuznetsova** (fired on c **December 28, 2020**) and the

deputy of Levin, **the archpriest Yauheni Hramyka** (dismissed on **December 22, 2020**) filed their letters of resignation to the Metropolitan Veniamin.





Also, **in November, 2020**, Vicar General of Minsk-Mogilev Archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop **Yury Kasabutsky**, received a warning form the Prosecutor-General's Office for his statements made on Facebook. The statements were devoted to the destruction of the spontaneous memorial dedicated to the memory of Raman Bandarenka in the Square of Change.

On June 8, 2021, a Synod of Bishops of the Belarusian Orthodox Church took place, on which it was decided to “sent to retirement” the Archbishop Artsemi of Grodno (Kishchenka), famous for his uncompromising stance towards the repressions of the regime. In June, 2021, he was forcefully removed from the pulpit. Over 60 graduates of the Theological Faculty of the EHU and the Institute of Theology of BSU wrote to support to their teacher. However, the fact of their support was not taken into consideration.



285 persons signed the **letter of support and gratitude** to the Archbishop Artsemi of Grodno, among them **29 theologians** - instructors and graduates of theological faculties and ecclesiastical schools, researchers; **21 representatives of minor orders**: subdeacons, readers, cantors, as well as bellmen, iconographers and teachers of Sunday schools, **16 Orthodox priests** (besides that, several Catholic and Greek-Catholic), 10 employees of the church entities of the Belarusian Orthodox Church.

On January 3, 2021, a Catholic believer **Maria Revutskaya**, born in 1955, participated in a Solemn mass held by Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz at the Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Minsk. During the mass the woman sang in the choir, and after the mass she went home. It was raining, so the believer opened her umbrella which was of white and red colour and had an inscription “Polska” (Poland) on it. Near the entrance to the subway, Maria Revutskaya was detained by 4 officers of uniformed agencies. She was placed under administrative penalty in the form of a fine in the sum of 960 Belarusian rubles.



On March 26, 2022 in Mogilev, enforcers detained a priest of the Greek-Catholic Church, **Vasily Yehorau**. He was arrested for three days for the poster saying “Ukraine, please forgive” that he hung out on his car. He was also fined for the sum of **1600 Belarusian rubles**. Before the trial, the priest was at a pre-trial detention facility.

At the beginning of August, 2020, the former Head of Pilgrimage Department of Bobrujsk Diocese, **Artsiom Kushner**, was forced to resign due to the pressure of the Diocesan administration after he had published a photo with a white bracelet - a symbol of free and fair elections, on social media. Kushner had also been an independent observer at the presidential elections. Before his dismissal, Artsiom Kushner had been worked with the Bobrujsk Diocese of the Belarusian Orthodox Church for almost 10 years. He was in charge of the Pilgrimage Department and Social Department of the Diocese, and for the last 5 years he headed the Spiritual and Educational Center of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker.



In July 2020, Artsiom joined the initiative “Honest People” and registered as an independent observer. After leaving the polling station, he made a photo with a white ribbon on his wrist and posted it on the Instagram. After that, his administration started pressurizing him.



On July 5, 2021, for disassembly of surveillance cameras **Andrei Budai**, a Christian pastor and a father of many children, was detained. Soon, the hooliganism case was reclassified into 6 articles of the Criminal Code, including the Article on terrorism. He was charged with participation in the initiative "Busly Liatsiats" ("Storks Flying"). The MIA called him the “senior of the group”. Besides a huge term (15 years of imprisonment in a maximum-security correctional facility) he was also sentenced to a fine in the amount of 16 thousand Belarusian rubles.



On July 5, 2022, a Gospel attendant and wife of one of the pastors of Minsk Evangelical Church «New Testament» Filip Ivanou, **Lidziya Gormash**, was detained. Filip was released after detention, but Lidziya was sentenced to 2 years of restriction of liberty in an open-type correctional institution (“khimiya”). Taking into account the term spent in the pre-trial detention facility, she has 1,5 years more of imprisonment to serve.

On July 15, 2022, the GUBOPiK detained a priest, the Abbot of the Saint-Esprit parish in Vitebsk, **Andrei Vashchuk**. Three days later his first trial took place. The reason for the detention was his Facebook avatar with a white-red-white flag. Besides that, the investigation file says that the account contains also other protest photographs including ones with the flag of Ukraine. At the court hearing, Andrei Vashchuk said that the white-red-white flag for him is a symbol of Christianity. The judge sentenced him to 15 days of arrest. However, on July 20, 2022, a new trial against the priest was held, where he was accused of being a participant of the Telegram chat “free-vtb” which had been announced “extremist” by the regime. It resulted in another 15-day-long arrest (30 days of arrest in total) and confiscation of his mobile phone. Later, on September 9, 2022, Andrei Vashchuk was tried in absentia (he had gone to Lithuania on foot of August, 15). The priest was accused of posting pictures with swastika in caricature on February, 21, 2022 in the Telegram channel “Realnaya Belarus” (“Real Belarus”). A new police report was drawn in accordance with Art. 19.10, while he was still behind bars on other administrative detention report. In the result, Andrei Vashchuk was placed under administrative penalty in the form of a fine in the sum of 320 Belarusian rubles.



On July 7, 2022, in Smarhon, a trial of the priest **Yauhen Uchkuronis**, the Abbot of the Catholic Parish of Saint John Paul II, took place. He was accused of storing “extremist materials”. The priest was also fined for the sum of 640 Belarusian rubles.



In November, 2020, the Archpriest Siarhei Tsimashenkau criticized BOC Metropolitan Veniamin’s meeting with Aliaksandr Lukashenka and supported the hymn Mahutny Bozha. After that, he was dismissed from the position of the head of the the Synodal Missionary department of the Belarusian Orthodox Church.

On July 7, 2022, the pastor of the Living Faith Protestant church of Gomel, **Dzmitry Padlobka**, as fined for the sum of 640 Belarusian rubles for an unauthorized christening in a swimming pool at his own plot. He was charged for a “unauthorized event”.



On September 20, 2022, in Minsk, the pastor of the Protestant church “New Life”, **Viachaslau Hancharenka**, was detained and imposed a fine on in the sum of 3200 Belarusian rubles He was summoned to Frunzensky District Office of Internal Affairs where he was detained. The reason was holding a Sunday meeting of believers.

On April 26, 2021, on the Day of memory of victims of radiation accidents and catastrophes in Vitebsk, two girls were detained: a 19-year-old student, **Maria Amasovich**, and a 23-year-old kindergarten teacher, **Lizavieta Kiryjenka**. The put and lit candles on the steps of the Resurrection Church to commemorate the victims of the Chernobyl tragedy. The court found their actions to be an “unsanctioned picketing”. During the court hearing, Ms. Amasovich and Ms. Kiryjenka pleaded not guilty. They explained that they lit the candles to commemorate the victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe. They declared that they had not express publicly any “social and political views”. The court found the girls guilty and sentenced Lizavieta Kiryjenka to 10 and Maria Amasovich to 20 days of arrest.



On March 25, 2022, the Abbot of the Catholic parish in Lntupy, Postavsky district, Rev. **Aliaksandr Baran** was detained for 10 days, and in April for 17 days. The reason was the priest’s participation in actions of solidarity in August, 2020, when he, together with his parishioners, went out in the street across the church with flowers in his hands to protest against violence. In March, 2022, the priest was detained again for a photo with a yellow-blue and white-red-white flags that he posted on the social media. He had to stay 6 days in detention, and then, in May, he was imposed a fine on in the amount of 960 Belarusian rubles for a repost of a video from Belsat TV channel.

On July 8, 2021, a search was carried out in the house of the pastor of Evangelical Church of Novolukoml (Chashnitsky district, Vitebsk region) **Aliaksandr Zaretsky**, who had signed a letter against violence.



On March 29, 2022, the Abbot of the parish of Jesus the Merciful, Rev. **Andrzej Bulczak**, urgently left Belarus. During the time of his service, which is 14 years, he built two Catholic churches: one in Chashniki and one in Postavy. In 2022, Lukashenka’s enforcers got interest in him. Rev. Andrzej was brought administrative charges against for a short video, posted at the

beginning of March on the YouTube channel which the priest held together with the church youth. The video said that people in Belarus were against the war. In May of the same year, Rev. Andrzej Bulczak was fined in absentia for the sum of 960 Rubles. Having learned about the fine imposed on him, Rev. Bulchak said that he would pay it, but to Ukraine.



The Orthodox priest **Aliaksandr Shramko** created a Telegram channel “Pop vne igry” (“Priest outside the game”) where he was actively speaking about protests 2020. Then, he had to immigrate to Vilnius in order to avoid repressions. Before that, Rev. Shramkohad had been removed from the priesthood for criticizing the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

On August 18, 2020, in the Holy Elizabeth Monastery (Minsk) a general meeting was held on which the spiritual father of the monastery, Andrei Lemiashonak, spoke in support of Aliaksandr Lukashenka and offered a theory of conspiracy against the Russian Orthodox Church as interpretation of what was going on, saying that with the rule of Tsikhanouskaya gay parades and same-sex marriages would happen. When the parishioners offered alternative statements, he said that he would like everybody in the monastery to have similar views, and if somebody does not like that that person “was not held there by force”. After the general meeting, during several months, a huge number of the monastery’s employees were fired or forced to resign because of their civic stance. Among them, after his speech at the general meeting of the monastery, the monastery’s procurement specialist, **Vitaly Leanovich**, was fired. Also, the monastery canceled the long-term creative collaboration with its years long parishioner and head of the monastery’s theatre studio “Radost” (“Joy”), **Aliaksandr Zhdanovich**. It happened after the detention of **Mr. Zhdanovich** for 9 days on **November 8, 2020**, he made the sign of cross over the riot police operatives who were cruelly treating the protesters. At the beginning of 2022, Mr. Zhdanovich fled Belarus.



On April 15, 2021, a Catholic priest, a member of the Capuchin order, **Andrei Zhylevich**, the director of the **organization Caritas**, was replaced; the new director of *Caritas* became the capuchin Anatoli Yaroshka. It happened after the Department on humanitarian activity refused *Caritas* the possibility to get sponsor aid on one of their projects. Mr. Zhylevich had been very active during the protests: in August, 2020, he was near the detention centre in Okrestina lane together with the Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz.

On January 21, 2021, the priest **Aliaksandr Kukhta**, who had served a memorial service for Roman Bandarenka, had organized a flash mob “Orthodox Christians are against: falsifications, humiliation of the person, pressures on the person”, and had participated in the volunteer camp near the detention center in Okrestina lane, was removed from the missionary department of the Belarusian Orthodox Church.





On April 19, 2022, the pastor of the Baptist Church Light of Hope, **Vitali Chychmarou**, was detained. In 2020 he was fired from Electrotechnical Plant named after V. I. Kozlov, where he was an engineer, for his trade union activity. He was the head of the primary organization of the Free Metal Workers' Union at the enterprise, and actively participated in the trade union movement for fair elections and good working conditions. Before his pastorate, Vitali was in a music band “Antivirus”. He was detained, his home was searched. Vitali was charged "organization and preparation of actions that seriously harm social stability, or active participation in them." As of the beginning of October, 2022, Vitali Chychmarou was at the pretrial detention centre.

On September 27, 2020, a believer from Gomel, **Larysa Sautsina**, was in the street holding a poster above her head with the following quote from the Bible: “Behold, I am coming soon, and My reward is with Me, to give to each one according to what he has done.” In the result, she was placed under administrative penalty in the form of a fine in the amount of 135 Belarusian rubles.



On September 7, 2021, by the decision of the Synod of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, the Coordinator and Head of the Association of Confraternities of Charity of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, **Alena Zenkevich**, was fired. Alena was the founder of the Association of Confraternities and its executive secretary. Thanks to her authority in the Orthodox community of Belarus, in August-September, 2020 she was recommended to be a representative of the Orthodox democratic movement to the Coordination Council.

Several priests managed to flee abroad and avoid criminal prosecution.



On August 11, 2020, in Baranavichy, Sergianist priest, **Dzmitry Prystupa**, (serving in Liakhavichy), was attacked by the military while driving a car. According to the priest, while the enforcers were hitting his car, he tried to drive away from them and touched one of them with the side mirror. For that, Rev. Prystupa was charged with violence against a law enforcement operative, facing up to 6 years of imprisonment. The priest had to run abroad from the criminal prosecution.



On August 10, 2020, in Minsk, the preacher of the Gospel Church, **Sergiy Melyanets**, and his two brothers, **Mikalai** and **Aleksei**, were detained. The brothers were praying for peace in Belarus in their car, parked near the Minsk Concert Hall. Mikalai and Aleksei got beaten with batons. Sergiy was tortured with an electric shocker; he was sent to hospital when

he started to have convulsions and his extremities got numb. The doctor diagnosed a heart attack, tachycardia, clouding of consciousness. Segiy talked about the torture he has survived on his Facebook, in the project “August2020” and the project “Witnesses of violence”. His brothers Mikalai and Aleksei were sent to Zhodino prison. All the three brothers were taken to trial. The court sent the case for revision, and later it was closed at the expiration of the Statute of limitations. At the end of August, Sergiy Melyanets put blinds on the windows of his bedroom in his private house in white-red-white colors. On December 18, 2020, a police report was drawn against him for “deliberate holding of an unsanctioned one-person picket”. In court, Rev. Melyanets said that he had put the blinds “because I like the colors and they reflect my Christian belief system. The white color symbolizes holiness, that we, the believers, obtain thanks to the blood of Jesus Christ spelt on the cross for our sins”. In the result, he was placed under administrative penalty in the form of a fine in the sum of 870 Belarusian rubles. To the educational institutions where the children of Sergiy Melyanets studied, informational notes were sent by the Department of Internal Affairs of the Minsk District Executive Committee, saying that he “maintains underage children in huge quantities” (Sergiy Melyanets and his wife raise seven children), prescribing to the administrations of those educational institutions to “take prophylactic measures with the said family” and informing that a “social investigation” had been started against the family. The elder son, who studied in a college in Minsk, was subject to pressure, threatened with expulsion in spite of his good studies and discipline, in case new communications about his father’s so-called “unlawful conduct” arrived. Also, in the secondary school of the village Privolny, the second son of Sergiy Melyanets was summoned to the psychologist’s office where he was subject to psychological pressure.



On August 11, 2020, in Kobryn, an evangelical, the Co-Chair of the Organizing Committee organizing committee for the creation of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party, **Heorhi Dzmitruk**, was detained by people without insignia while he was going to a prayer. He was taken to the local office of internal affairs and severely beaten: they hit him on the body, hit his head against a wall, beat him with a baton on his hip and

lower leg during the interrogation. Mr Dzmitruk was kept in an isolator with a concrete floor without any footwear. He was ungroundedly accused of being a part of LGBT community and threatened to put him in a cell where he would be subject to sexual violence. Because of the threat of criminal prosecution, he was forced to flee Belarus.



On August 25, 2020, in Minsk, a priest of the non-canonical Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, **Leanid Akulovich**, was detained. Leanid went out on a square to “fight the Antichrist” and was making the sign of cross over the gathered people.

On May 17, 2022, the believers who came to lay flowers to the commemorative

plaque of the Metropolitan of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Melchisedec, placed on the building of the Institute of Theology. Among the detainees were the Father **Leanid Akulovich** and the social activist **Nina Bahinskaya**. They were all released without execution of police reports.



On March 3, 2022, in the Cathedral on Nemiga, mothers of Belarusian fighters gathered to pray for peace; they had not known each other before that. Women had no posters; they were only praying. After the prayer arrests started, at least four women were detained. It is known, that the priest of the Cathedral was asking OMON (the riot police) to release the people, but the enforcers refused. Among the detained people, was the owner of the bar “Siniaya Koza” (“The Blue Goat”), **Aksana Fiodarava**. It is known that Aksana is undergoing chemotherapy treatment. Together with her, Anastasia Nekrashevich, Tatsiana Kotes and Katsiaryna Mikhailava were detained. The police tried to find one more woman at her home the next day, but she did not show up there. A journalist of Novy Chas, Dzyana Seradziuk, and her husband, Yauhen Batura, were detained on the same day near the church and sentenced to 15 days of arrest.

On August 22, 2020, in Minsk, two evangelicals were detained for participation in a protest action in Brest, the cousins **Daniil Bandaruk** from Brest and **Mark Salonikau** from Mogielv, both from religious families with many children. In March, 2021, a cousin’s friend, evangelical Aliaksandr Viniarski, was detained. They were charged with participation in mass riots. The court sentenced the believers the following way: Daniil Bandaruk was sentenced to 5 years and Mark Salonikau to 4.5 years of imprisonment in a maximum-security correctional facility, Aliaksandr Viniarski was sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment in a juvenile correctional facility. Before their detention, Daniil, Mark and Aliaksandr recorded a video in a car where they performed a Christ-praise song.



On January 23, 2021, in Minsk, two women, participants of the project “Street Medicine”, Karina Radchanka and Tatsiana Loboza, were detained during their volunteering activity: medical examination of homeless people. Karina, who had organized the project, is a graduate of the Institute of Theology of BSU. The court sentenced each of them to 15 days of arrest.

On July 12, 2021, an active Catholic believer, creator of the group of pray for Belarus in Viber “Holy Scripture for Motherland”, a father of ten children, **Ruslan Tashtsimirau**, was detained. The KGB burst into his apartment with a search, they seized white-red-white flags, a computer and a phone. Tashtsimirau was released after interrogation under the pledge of secrecy.



On August 13, 2021, it became known that priest **Ioann Tiutiunnikov**, an Orthodox priest from Zhodino, the Abbot of the church under construction in honor of the Transfiguration of the Lord, cleric of the Church in honor of icon of the Virgin «Redeemer», Son of Diocesan Zhodino District Archpriest, Nikolai Tiutiunnikov, was detained. According to “Maya Kraina Belarus’, the reason for the detention was the song “We Long for Change” by Viktor Tsoj, and the priest was sentenced to 10 days of arrest for that. However, according to the information

of the parishioners, he was placed under administrative penalty in the form of a fine in the sum of 5 thousand Belarusian rubles.

On October 1, 2021, an iconographer from Gomel, **Kanstantsin Prusau**, was detained for a repost of a video from a YouTube channel announced “extremist” by the regime. The repost was made in a chat with 54 participants. In spite the fact, that the 42-year-old Prusau has a disability due to insulin-dependent diabetes, the court sentenced him to 14 days of administrative arrest.



On November 2, 2022, in Brest, the rector of the Greek Catholic newspaper Tsarkva (Church), **Ihar Baranouski**, was detained. He was sentenced to 15 days of arrest. It is known, that Mr. Baranouski was charged under Article 19.11 (Distribution of extremist materials) for a publication, which appeared in May, 2021 on the Facebook page of the newspaper

Tsarkva which contained a video of Belsat. However, the materials of Belsat were announced “extremist” only in July, 2021.

This arrest is not the first one for Ihar Baranouski. In the autumn of 2020, he was arrested for 30 days. In the summer of 2021, he was subject to pressure again for reposts of links to Belsat TV channel, administrative cases opened against him, trials prolonged in time. The cases were sent to be revised several times, but in the end, it became known that he was sentenced to a fine in the amount of 540 Belarusian rubles.

The activist believer himself commented at the time, that the pressure exerted on him was motivated by the letter of the Metropolitan Veniamin to bishops of the Belarusian Orthodox Church about a threat of activization of Uniates in Belarus, pointing at Ihar Baranousky personally and at the administrative procedure held against him as an example of the “protest activity” of Greek Catholics.

On September 23, 2022, a political prisoner, a graduate of the Orthodox school of bellringers, **Tatsiana Lasitsa**, was released. Tatsiana is a volunteer of the Homiel branch of the Human Rights Center "Viasna". She had been detained on January 21, 2021, under the charges of "organization and preparation of actions that seriously harm social stability, or active participation in them" and sentenced to 2,5 years of imprisonment. She served the biggest part of her term.



On November 30, 2020, in Ivatsevichy, a Greek Catholic priest, Father **Vitaly Bystrou**, was sentenced to 10 days of arrest. Fr. Vitaly was charged under Article 23.34. The reason for the prosecution was a protest action that had taken place in Brest. The day before, the Greek Catholic parish in Ivatsevichy got an official warning from regional bodies with the wording “for participation of a priest in an unauthorized event”.



On August 9, 2020, in Baranavichy, representatives of the Catholic community of sergianist priests, Father Eduard Sinkevich from Postavy and Father Aliaksandr Fiadotau from Grodno, were detained. Rev. Eduard Sinkevich came to vote from the town of Postawy to his hometown, where his friend, Rev. Aliaksandr Fiadotau, was serving. They were sentenced correspondingly to 10 and 8 days of arrest.



On December 8, 2020, a Greek Catholic priest, **Aleksei Varanko**, who in August had participated in peaceful actions in Vitebsk and had prayed for Belarus with a white-red-white flag in his hands, was detained for a day.

Also, **on December 8, 2020**, a Catholic priest, **Viktar Zhuk**, a Jesuit, pastor of the parish of St. Vladislav of Vitebsk, was detained. The next day he was released.

The cases of both priests were sent to be revised.



On February 28, 2022, during an anti-war action of protest against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, that took place near the railway station in Minsk, an Orthodox priest **Mikhail Maruha** was detained. For a bouquet of flowers in his hands he was sentenced to 13 days of arrest.



On September 18, 2020, Archpriest **Uladzimir Drabysheuski**, was sentenced first to 10, and then to 15 days of administrative arrest. The court decided that the priest had violated the established order of picketing by his presence on September 11 near Gomel state technical University named after P. O. Sukhoi with a self-made poster



picturing Isaak Newton and the third law of classical mechanics formulated by him: “For every action there is an opposite reaction”. The second time, the priest was charged for being near a house on September, 6, where an unsanctioned mass gathering event was held at the moment. The Archpriest Uladzimir Drabysheuski is a father of six children. On July 31, 2020, at a session of the Diocesan Council, the Archpriest Uladzimir Drabysheuski was banned from serving.

On December 8, 2021, a search was made at the place of an evangelical, theologian and church historian, **Dzmitry Khvedaruk**. During the search he was subject to beatings, a white-red-white flag was tied tightly around the neck, he was not allowed to take it off. Dzmitry Khvedaruk was sentenced to 15 days of arrest. The regime’s channel “Zhelye Slivy” published a video with the believer, as well as photos of his apartment during the search, on which the book of Jochem Daum “Roads of the Old Testament” was shown. The channel used humiliating epithets in relation to Mr. Khvedaruk, and groundlessly called him an “extremist”. During his arrest at the delinquents’ detention centre in Okrestina lane, Mr. Kvedaruk was in a 4-bed cell with 18 other people. he was not allowed to receive a single parcel during his detention.

On September 27, 2020, an Old Believer **Herman Sniashkou** from Gomel was detained for participation in a peaceful action of protest against falsification of elections in the Republic of Belarus. The next day he was sentenced to 14 days of arrest. Herman’s wife, **Natallia Sniashkova**, was detained and taken to a temporary detention facility. The two underage children, Aglaia and Matvei, were sent to an orphanage. The next day, Natallia Sniashkova was tried and placed under administrative penalty in the form of a fine in the sum of 324 Belarusian rubles. After the trial, Natallia managed to take the children from the orphanage. The family are active parishioners of the Old Believer Church of St. Elijah of Gomel. **The World Alliance for Old Believers** made a public statement about the prosecution of the Sniashkou family. By the New Year, Herman Sniashkou managed to reunite with his family in Vilnius.



On October 18, 2022, in Grodno, a Candidate of History, Associate Professor of Grodno State University, **Sviatlana Silova**, was detained. She was imposed a fine on, her phone was confiscated. Sviatlana Silova’s circle of scientific interests included the history of the Orthodox Church. For about 15 years, she has been collaborating as a volunteer scientific expert with Grodno Eparchy. The historian had participated and

organized tens of events, actively developed cooperation with Minsk Theological Academy in Zhirovychy. Silova is a member of the Diocesan Commission for the Canonization of Saints.

On October 18, 2022, in Minsk, a search was conducted in the apartment of an Orthodox Christian, a woman researcher and guide **Valeryia Chernamortseva**. The detained woman had worked with the issue of New Martyrs and the Soviet persecution of the Church. Thus, the tendency is detected when another Orthodox researcher of history gets behind bars.



On March 25, 2022, the pastor of the Baptist community of Veremejka (Cherikausky district, Mogilev region) which makes part of the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists in the Republic of Belarus, **Roman Rozhdestvensky**, was detained. His computer and telephone were confiscated. The reason of his detention

was his reposts on social media from a channel of an independent mass media, announced “extremist” by the regime, as well as likes that he left under publications of the channel. In the result, he was placed under administrative penalty in the form of a fine in the amount of 540 Belarusian rubles.

In July, 2021, it became known that an Orthodox priest **Heorhi Roy** was dismissed from the position of the Rector of Intercession Cathedral. At the same time, **Mikalai Haiduk** was dismissed from the position of the rector of St. Nicholas Church of Archbishop's metochion, and **Anatoli Nenartovich** was dismissed from the position of the secretary of Grodno Diocese.



Undoubtedly, threats and direct repressions existed in Belarus also before the year 2020. The regime has not been ashamed to attack church ministers for a long time. For example, on August 31, 2013, a priest of the Greek Catholic Church of Belarus, **Uladzislau Lazar**, was cruelly detained and accused of espionage. The priest was released only half a year later, the case against him was closed.



On January 9, 2020, for the support of people protesting against the integration with Russia, a priest of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Viktar Kavalkou (Father Vikentiy) was imposed a fine on in the amount of 1350 Belarusian rubles. Before that, the priest had been imposed another fine on, in the amount of 382.5 Rubles for participation in the Chernobylski Shliakh (The Chernobyl Path). From the beginning of 2019, Father Vikentiy

has been detained thrice, three police reports drawn against him. At the beginning of June, the priest was detained by operatives of the Pervomajski district office of internal affairs for forensic psychiatric expert examination.

There is an example of political harassment of a song. Thus, the song “**Mahutny Bozha**” (Mighty God), that has become a real hymn for a lot of Belarusians, was multiple times prohibited even for singing at religious events. We know of the cases of **prohibition to pray for Ukraine** in some Orthodox churches.





On October 29, 2020, the leading soloist, a laureate of prestigious international contests, a holder of fellowship of State programmes of support for talented youth, **Ilya Silchukou**, was fired from the National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre in spite of his 15 years of irreproachable work. The informal reason of his dismissal was his

performance of the spiritual hymn “Mahutny Bozha”, which he sang on the steps of the State Philharmonia. Ilya Silchukou also participated in the musical video on that song. Ilya Silchukou is an active Baptist believer.

On October 21, 2020, the court rendered a judgement against musicians of a **Christian band Laudans, Andrei Luhin and Alena Palachanskaya**. Each of them was sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest. On October, 20, the Christian band was invited by the residents of the nearby buildings to hold a small street concert in Angarskaya street in Minsk. During the concert the band performed several compositions of spiritual theme, like “Adzinstva” (Unity), “Ahmen”, “Freedom in the Heart”, and also covers of popular Belarusian songs. Several dozens of people came to listen to the band.



Since the beginning of Russia’s war against Ukraine, the Belarusian regime tightened surveillance and repression against people, including priests. Some of the examples were shown above, and here is one more.

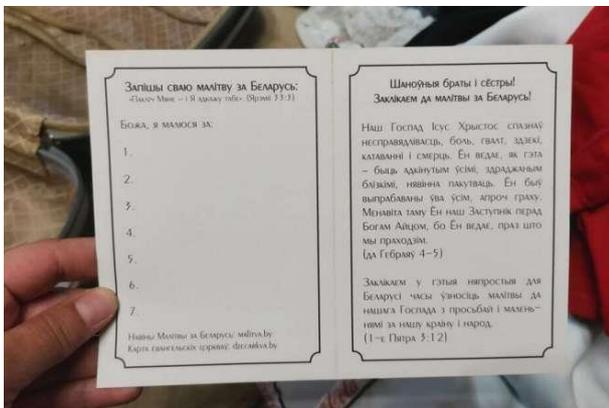


On April 18, 2022, a Catholic priest from Gorky, the Abbot of the parish of Our Lady of Belynishy, **Andrei Kevlich**, was detained, and on May, 12 he was imposed a fine on in the amount of 640 Belarusian rubles. An administrative police report was drawn against him for reposts from pages of the independent mass media. Both reposts were against Russian military aggression against Ukraine.

On April 30, 2022, a Catholic priest from Stolbtsy, **Ihar Lashuk**, was sentenced to a fine in the amount of 960 Belarusian rubles, also for reposts of independent mass media publications. At the beginning of March, 2022, the priest undertook a pilgrimage with a figure of Archangel Michael along the border with Ukraine. The court also decided to confiscate his telephone as “a crime weapon”. Father Ihar Lashuk from Stolbtsy is one of the most famous priests in the country specializing in construction and reconstruction of Catholic churches.



On July 21, 2022, the enforcers detained priests of a Minsk Church of Christians of Evangelic Faith “Gethsemane”, **Yauhen Barysik** and **Maksim Stasilevich**. Each of them was sentenced to 10 days of arrest. During the process of detention, packs of fliers “**A Prayer for Belarus**”, with an appeal to pray for the country and the people in “this difficult time”, quotes from the Gospel and the gospel hymn “We Will Wait for You, Jesus”, were seized. 10 days later only Rev. Barysik was released. Rev. Stasilevich was taken to custody as a defendant charged with "organization and preparation of actions that seriously harm social stability, or active participation in them." As of the beginning of October, he is waiting for trial in a pre-trial detention facility.



On May 18, 2022, the Abbot of the parish of the church of St. Spyridon of Trimythous in Grodno, priest Fr. Andrei Nozdrin, was dismissed from all his positions. He was one of the three Grodno priests who was helping detained people during the protests 2020. Also, he openly spoke against the war in Ukraine.

On May 20, 2022, a Catholic believer, **Aliaksandr Danilevich**, a parishioner of the St. Symon and Alena Church in Minsk (the Red church), a lawyer and a father of many children, was detained. In the framework of a criminal case about “harming the national safety of Belarus”, he was put in the pre-trial detention facility in Volodarsky Street. Shortly before his arrest, Aliaksandr signed an antiwar message of Belarusian lawyers and jurists against the war in Ukraine, motivating it by his faith in God and the desire to fulfill the Commandments. He was also fired from Belarusian State University, where he had been an instructor at the faculty of international relations for over 20 years.



Representatives of the regime's media are also zealous in persecutions.

Here's one of the posters, mocking those religious figures and believers who protest against falsifications, violence and repression.



On May 8, 2022, a propagandist of Lukashenka, employee of the TV channel STC, Hryhory Azaronak, criticized the sermon of the Orthodox Archimandrite **Aliaksei Shynkevich**, at Minsk Cathedral with an appeal pray for the repose of the soul of the first leader of the independent Belarus, Stanislau Shushkevich. Azaronak called the priest a “Judas”, a “God-seller” who should be “erased from the body of the Church” and called on the “bodies of national security” to deal with the situation.

On July 8, 2021, an employee of the newspaper Katolichesky Vestnik (Catholic Messenger), **Dzmitry Lupach** from Glubokoye, was detained. Three days later the journalist was released.



On August 27, 2020, in solidarity with and to support the right to the freedom of religion, because the day before the OMON (riot police) had blocked the entrance to the church, believers of different confessions were planning a procession from the Orthodox Holy Spirit Cathedral in Liberty Square in Minsk to the Catholic St. Symon and Alena Church (the Red church). When the believers arrived to the Cathedral, they saw that it was surrounded by operatives of uniformed agencies in civilian clothes. An evangelistic preacher, **Uladzimir Mayorau**, preached in front of three riot police officers and one police officer in plain clothes. Upon reaching the destination point of the procession at the Red Church, the believers read several psalms and briefly prayed; the pastor of the Trinity Evangelical Church in Minsk, **Taras Telkovsky**, read psalms and prayed for Belarus and the release of political prisoners. Immediately after that, the group was surrounded by riot police. All the men from this group were detained and taken to the Pieršamajski district police station where protocols were drawn up under art. 23.34. The fate of three detainees in this episode is known: Pastor **Taras Telkovsky** was fined in the amount of 810 Belarusian rubles, Evangelical believer **Uladzimir Mayorau**, was sentenced to 8 days of administrative arrest. A student of the Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine (Kyiv), **Zmitser Khvedaruk**, was sentenced to 7 days of arrest, which he spent in the temporary detention facility in Zhodino.



On November 2, 2022, in Brest, a Greek Catholic priest, **Ihar Kandratsieu**, the leader of the community of Saint Peter and Andrew. Enforcers detained Father Ihar directly at the church, right before the beginning of an evening mass. According to the preliminary data, the official reason for detention is distribution or

publication of “extremist” materials. The Uniate priest has been subject to 12 days of arrest. Before, Father Ihar actively participated in protest actions, after August 9, 2020, he went out every day to support people at rallies and those waiting for their loved ones near the walls of pre-trial detention facilities and temporary detention facilities. On August 16, at a many-thousand meeting with the Brest Mayor, Aliaksandr Rahachuk, the priest called on the head of the city to immediately release all detained during the protests. The Chairman of the Executive Committee agreed, and Father Ihar went to the detention facility and stayed there all night till the morning, when the last detained person was released. The Prosecutor General's Office issued Father Ihar a warning. The regime pressurized the priest threatening to deprive the community of the registration.



On October 11, 2022, in Minsk, a New Generation church pastor and founder of the initiative “Ways of Freedom”, working with alcohol and drug addicted people, Rev. **Siarhei Paulousky**, was detained. In the “repentance video”, published on the regime's Telegram channel, the man says that he participated in unsanctioned mass gathering events in 2020. The video is accompanied by a mocking comment, that the pastor allegedly used patients of the rehabilitation

centre for his “propagandist” aims. The post is accompanied by a photo of the pastor with a white-red-white flag with an inscription “Let my people go” (a reference to the Old Testament book Exodus and the stories of the demand to free Israelis from Egyptian captivity. That Biblical phrase was used by Christian activists during the peaceful protests of 2020).

By the way, a lot of the detainees are forced to participate in recording of such videos and “repent before Lukashenka”, which is a form of torture. The methods of coercion can be both physical and moral. Often a threat not to the detainees, but to their relatives and close people are used to force them do something they are not inclined to do.

In Minsk Diocese, ruled by the **Metropolitan Veniamin (Tupeka)**, the priests are forbidden to cover the issue of violence and political repression, as well as to pray “for the gift of peace to the people of Belarus”, approved and accepted on August, 5 by the **Minsk Metropolitan Pavel (Panamarou)** and then-recommended for use in all the “churches and communities of monks”. There are facts of an interdiction to preach for specific priests. Since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine of **February, 24, 2022**, there have been cases of a ban of a prayer for Ukraine. Information about such bans has arrived from several **priests of Grodno Diocese**, according to whom it was the **Archbishop Antoniy (Daronin) who** forbade such prayers.

The level of cynicism and thorough eradication of everything that can be associated with a protest, as well as with support of Ukraine or support of clearly humanistic ideas, is leading to more repression and persecution in Belarus. Even if it is related to usual rituals.

On September 9, 2022, in Bobrujsk, **Viachaslau Bukas** was found and arrested. The man had been identified by his fingerprints. The fingerprints were taken from the grave lanterns that the believer put in front of the monument to victims of repressions. The grave lanterns were of two colors, blue and yellow, which the court perceived as a symbol of the flag of Ukraine. That “aggravated” crime was thoroughly investigated, with the involvement of a forensic team. Viachaslau Bukas was sentenced to 15 days of arrest, since the court decided that his grave lanterns participated in unsanctioned mass gathering events.





On **October 30, 2020**, a Lutheran Theology student, **Mikhail Shavel'sky**, was arrested in his apartment in Grodno and passed the whole day under interrogation, where he was told that he did not need his fingers anymore, because he did not want to write down the names of his friends with whom he had been at peaceful protests against falsification of the presidential election. However, the KGB operative forcefully unlocked his phone with his fingerprint and gained access to all his phone calls and contacts. The next day a speedy trial

followed, which sentenced Mikhail to 9 days of arrest; during those 9 days the interrogations did not stop. Upon his release, Mikhail was obliged to appear at the military commissariat and join the army, as an additional punishment. Fortunately, the student ran to Poland where he was granted a scholarship and entered the Theological Academy in Warsaw. Mikhail Shavel'sky was killed in the line of duty in Ukraine, where he was a paramedic in a Belarusian military detachment fighting for Ukraine.

During his speech for the Berlin Cathedral, the Theological student Mikhail Shavel'ski, killed in the line of duty in Ukraine, explained his motives to help Ukrainians in the following way:

“I would like to start with a quote from the sixteenth Article of the Augsburg Confession: “Therefore, Christians are necessarily bound to obey their own magistrates and laws, save only when commanded to sin, for then they ought to obey God rather than men [Acts 5:29]”.



On **October 28, 2022**, the priest Uladzislau Bahamolnikau was convicted for the fifth time. By that time, he had been in the pretrial detention centre in Okrestina lane (Minsk) for two months in a row.

At the fifth trial he was convicted to 15 days of administrative arrest. The charges pressed against him are unknown; the previous time he had been tried for “reposting extremist materials”. Thus, the priest has already been convicted to 74

days of arrest in total.

Why he is getting re-detained over and over again, is not known. Presumably, it is done to pressurize him for his refusal to cooperate with the regime's enforcers (the fact, that no

“repentance videos” with Uladzislau Bahamolnikau have been published, is an indirect proof of such refusal).

Uladzislau Bahamolnikau was arrested on August 31, 2022; to arrest him, they broke the door to his apartment. On September 1, 2022, he was sentenced to 14 days of arrest; upon their termination, he was sentenced to another 15 days. The next day after the second trial, the third one took place where he was sentenced to another 15 days of arrest for “reposting extremist materials”. The fourth trial took place on October, 15.



On **November 2, 2022**, in Brest, the regime's enforcers came for a Uniate priest Ihar Kandratsieu (on the photo) and the editor of the newspaper Tsarkva (Church), Ihar Baranouski.

The priest of the Greek-Catholic Church, Ihar Kandratsieu, was detained right in the church around 6 p.m., before the evening service.

During the protest, Ihar Kandratsieu went out into the streets, talked to people standing in solidarity chains and prayed together with them. He said that in 2020 he demanded from the head of the city executive committee to release detained people.

Also, in Brest, a history researcher, ethnographer and editor of the newspaper Tsarkva (Church), Ihar Baranouski, was arrested. The newspaper covers the activity of Greek-Catholic communities in Belarus and in other countries. In 2020, Ihar Baranouski served 30 days of arrest for participation in the protests.



On **November 4, 2022**, in Brest, the court sentenced to an administrative arrest two previously detained people: the Greek-Catholic priest, Ihar Kandratsieu, and the editor of the newspaper Tsarkva (Church), Ihar Baranouski.

According to the information, obtained from human rights defenders, in the morning on

November, 4, Ihar Kandratsieu’s place was searched, and in the afternoon he and Ihar Baranouski were brought to trial. The judge Andrei Hrushko sentenced the priest to 12 days of administrative arrest, it’s not known under what charges.

Also, he convicted Ihar Baranouski to 15 days of arrest. The editor was charged with distribution of “extremist” materials (Art. 19.11 of the Administrative Offences Code) for a publication with appeared in May, 2021, on the Facebook page of Tsarkva: a video of Belsat was there. The materials of Belsat were announced “extremist” by the regime only in July, 2021. However, that detail was not considered important by the court.

On **November 14, 2022**, a court in Minsk convicted the priest Uladzislau Bahamolnikau, repeatedly mentioned in this monitoring report, for the sixth time. Another administrative offence report was drawn against Rev. Uladzislau, and another, sixth trial, took place. Again, he was sentenced to 15 more days of arrest. The charges pressed against him are not known, but the previous time he had been tried for “reposting extremist materials”. By the time of the trial, the priest had spent 74 days in the detention facility in Okrestina lane; now, the term of his arrest grew up to 89 days.



On **November 17, 2022**, for unclear reasons, the regime’s enforcers detained a Catholic priest from Mogilev, Vital Chabatar.

Rev. Vital Chabatar belongs to the Order of Claretians, he has worked in Mogilev since 2007. In December, 2018, the Bishop Aliaksandr Yasheuski appointed him a Vice Dean of Mogilev Deanery. Vital Chabatar is a Vicar of the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua.



On **December 5, 2022**, in the Belarusian village of Pribytki on the border with Ukraine, the rector of a local Orthodox church was removed from the priesthood. As witnesses say, the official reason was the priest’s trip to Poland without permission, and the real reason were disagreements with the head of the diocese on many issues, the war in Ukraine among them.

Piotr Prakaptsou had served in the church for many years and enjoys a great reputation among his

parishioners. However, his relations with the Archbishop Stefan, the head of the Gomel diocese, have not been good. According to the believers, the latter has tried many times to find a reason to dismiss the priest, and not long ago such reason was found: Father Piotr had made a trip to Poland without the bishop's permission. During the time of his trip, services were not conducted in the parish, therefore the formal reason for the dismissal was "truancy".

- Father Piotr suffered deeply because of the Russian aggressions against Ukraine. It was because military equipment was transported through his village of Pribytki to kill, helicopters flew through it to bring death. How is it possible to calmly hold services, like nothing is happening? There are believers who stopped coming to sermons because they did not want to pray for the patriarch Kiryl as he had openly supported the aggression. Because of that, some people want to have nothing in common with the Russian Orthodox Church. The "Russian world" destroyed the parish and deprived it of its rector. The priest just wanted to go abroad for some time to recover, but the bishop would not give permission to do that. On the whole, the primates of the church now don't serve the God, they serve the power", witnesses of the conflict say.

The priest has been completely removed from priesthood in the parish, and was not offered a new job. He has remained without any means of existence.

On **December 9, 2022**, a criminal case was opened against the priest Uladzislau Bahamolnikau, who had passed 100 days in a pretrial detention centre by that time.

The criminal case against the priest Uladzislau Bahamolnikau was opened under Art. 342 (Organization and preparation of actions that seriously harm social stability, or active participation in them) of the Criminal Code of Belarus, he was detained as a suspect. The priest was not released after his seventh arrest. On the total, he spent over 100 days in the detention center in Okrestina lane since August, 31.

The conditions of his detention were torturous: in an overcrowded cell, without access to medical help, without parcels and correspondence. Father Uladzislau has a strong cough, that he has had since his first arrest, when he got sick with COVID-19.

On **December 19, 2022**, the priest Uladzislau Bahamolnikau was finally released under the written pledge not to leave country. He is still a defendant in a criminal case.



On **December 24, 2022**, it became known that a famous Belarusian Catholic priest and blogger, Viachaslau Barok, who was not scared to speak openly on such issues as war and sex, was forbidden to speak in public by the Church authorities.

Rev. Barok apologized to everybody whom he refused to give and interview or a comment on

the mass media, and explained the reason of his silence. As it turned out, in autumn, the Church administration forbade him to speak publicly on mass media and social media. In case of disobedience, the priest was threatened to be removed from his responsibilities.

- The bishop said that I “pay too much attention to the political situation in Belarus and in the world”, and that my statements cause outrage among believers and contribute to their separation and mutual dislike, Rev. Barok wrote.

According to the priest, all the attempts to find any understanding with the bishop Aleh Butkevich failed. Also, he is confident that the Church authorities misunderstood him:

- I have never spoken for any political party, I have never promoted any politicians and have never been involved into any political activity. Least of all I am worried about the political situation, most of all I am interested in the Kingdom of God which can be built only on the basis of truth and justice.

On **January 5, 2023**, in Minsk, an Orthodox priest, Dianisiy Karasteliou, was detained: he was denounced for a prayer service for fighters and defenders of Ukraine. The enforcers also said he had participated in the protests.

Dianisiy Karasteliou is a cleric of the Church of the icon of Our Lady of the Joy of All Who Sorrow in Minsk. His father, the Archpriest Ihar Karasteliou, is the rector of the church.

In a repentance video, the priest explained that on January, 1, he received a note asking to pray “for fighters and defenders of Ukraine” and performed the prayer service. After that, a visitor of the church expressed his discontent.

According to the enforcers’ version, Karasteliou “preached the enemy aggressive rhetoric trying to incite hatred.” They also claim that the priest had been brought to liability for participation in the protests and has “nationalistic tattoos” (the symbol Pahonia, which is a historical and cultural value, entered into the State Register of Historical and Cultural Values of Belarus).

Other claims of the enforcers are that Dianisiy Karasteliou “in his free time, plays computer games on the Internet with a strange nickname” and “spreads white-red-white symbols and correspondent ideas”.

As it became known, he was denounced by a pro-regime activist from Grodno, Volha Bondarava, who has been trying for a long time to “clean” the cultural space of Belarus by canceling a New Year’s theater play, for example, or a Halloween party.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, currently there is very little international attention to the problem of repression for one's views or religious beliefs.

In Belarus the right to the freedom of religion and convictions is extremely limited for both the regular parishioners and among priests, even more, for political prisoners.

Priests of various religious communities have become political prisoners.

The regime of Lukashenka holds under total control the spiritual life of the Belarusian people as an opportunity to spread the narratives convenient for those who call themselves the “power” in the country. The Orthodox community was under severe repression still in the times of the USSR; also, it has been well-diluted by regular and especially non-staff members of the KGB. Undoubtedly, with time, the total mass of such “servants” of the church (former and acting KGB operatives) has become very small, but it was them, who has t the hierarchy and the rules that the whole structure is abiding to. Also, it is possible to say, that the Orthodox Church has become very close to the state, supporting its politics in exchange for certain privileges offered by the power-occupying former Communist party and Komsomol members, as well as KGB operatives and state bodies representatives. A lot of hierarchs of other confessions conducted a compromising policy, thinking that the repressive apparatus will not thus be activated against their religious institutions, and it was a mistake. The regime is attacking priests that support their congregation with prayers and divine services in hard times, also it increases pressure and direct persecution of religious organizations in Belarus. The regime considers all institutions, including the religious ones, to be its enemies, even if what they do is keep neutral and just not support it directly.

The Belarusian regime is also persecuting the religious groups that have a small number of followers in Belarus, thus making it easier to tightly control the religious environment in the country.

It has become a worrying tendency, that during detentions, interrogations and in custody, the believers are subject to torture and derogatory treatment, as well as to damage to their health and life. During detention, the believers and presumably believers are treated more violently and cruelly than regular detainees. A lot of arrests of priests and believers started in the summer of 2022. Today Lukashenka is taking churches away from the believers.

It is direct evidence that the situation with the freedom of conscience and freedom of belief in Belarus is getting worse.