

PUBLIC

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UA 121/08 Torture and other ill-treatment/health concern

BELARUS Emanuel Zeltser (m), US national

US national Emanuel Zeltser was detained when he flew in to Belarus on 12 March. He is held in a state security services detention facility in the capital, Minsk, where according to his lawyer he has been interrogated and beaten, and has been denied the medicine he needs urgently to treat his diabetes and arthritis.

On 21 March he was charged with "use of forged documents." The US Embassy in Minsk has been allowed to visit him only twice, on 27 March and 25 April. After the second visit, the US Consul, Caroline Savage, reported that Emanuel Zeltser's health was failing, noting that he had lost weight, was very weak and had difficulty walking and talking, and that he had been beaten two or three times while in custody.

Emanuel Zeltser suffers from Type 2 diabetes and a severe form of arthritis, for which he has been on prescription medication for over 15 years. A letter from his doctor to the Prosecutor General in Belarus states that without access to the appropriate medication Emanuel Zeltser may suffer "excruciating debilitating pain" and risk irreversible multiple internal organ damage. Emanuel Zeltser's lawyer delivered the necessary medication to the detention facility, but according to his family the authorities are withholding it, and his health is deteriorating.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Belarus declared independence in 1991: it had been part of the Soviet Union, which collapsed earlier that year. Since President Alyaksandr Lukashenka came to power in 1994, respect for human rights in Belarus has deteriorated.

According to an umbrella group of human rights NGOs, the International Helsinki Federation (IHF), prison conditions in Belarus are often substandard, with inmates held in cramped cells which are dirty, poorly ventilated and have "inadequate hygiene facilities". The IHF reports that inmates risk torture or other ill-treatment, are given insufficient food and do not always receive the medical attention or medicines that they need.

Relations between Belarus and the US have become strained recently with the US applying increasing pressure on the Belarusian authorities to release political prisoners. In March and April, Belarus ordered the expulsion of the US Ambassador and 10 US diplomats from the embassy in Minsk, after the US authorities imposed sanctions on the country's state-controlled oil-processing and chemicals company, Belneftkhim, which accounts for about a third of the country's foreign currency earnings. Belarus is also reducing the number of diplomats at its embassy in Washington.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Belarusian, Russian, English or own language:

- calling on the authorities to ensure that Emanuel Zeltser receives immediately the medication his doctor has prescribed, which his lawyer brought to the detention facility;
- calling on the authorities to order an urgent, independent investigation of reports that Emanuel Zeltser has been tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and to bring those responsible to justice;

- urging the authorities to ensure that Emanuel Zeltser is protected from further torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to US consular representatives, lawyers of his choice and any medical attention he may require.

APPEALS TO:

Alyaksandr LUKASHENKA
President
Administratsia Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus
ul. Karla Marksa, 38
220016 Minsk
BELARUS

Fax: +375 17 226 06 10
+375 17 222 38 72

Salutation: Dear President Lukashenka

Grigorii VASILEVICH
Prosecutor General
Internatsionalnaya str., 22
220050 Minsk
BELARUS

Fax: +375 17 226 42 52

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

COPIES TO:

Vladimir NAUMOV
Minister of Internal Affairs
Gorodskoi Val str., 2
220050 Minsk
BELARUS

Fax: +375 17 226 12 47

Salutation: Dear Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of Belarus accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 June 2008.