

EU must halt Europe's last executioner

(Brussels, 27 July 2011) Amnesty International has responded to the recent execution of two Belarusian men by calling for Poland's European Union presidency to increase pressure on its eastern neighbour to abolish the death penalty. The country is the last European state to execute people.

"The dead men committed terrible crimes, but shouldn't have been executed", said Nicolas Beger, Director of Amnesty International's European Institutions Office. "No-one should suffer this ultimate denial of human rights. We've already urged the Polish presidency to impress this message on the authorities in Minsk. Poland should use the Eastern Partnership summit in Warsaw this September to rally EU support for Belarus to abolish the death penalty, free its prisoners of conscience and guarantee freedom of association and expression."

The exact date of 28 year-old Andrei Burdyka's execution is not known, but it is believed to have taken place between 14 and 19 July. Another man convicted over the same case was also believed to have been executed although this has not yet been confirmed. Amnesty International considers that application of the death penalty in Belarus is compounded by a flawed criminal justice system which uses capital punishment in a way which violates international laws and standards. There is credible evidence that torture and ill-treatment are used to extract 'confessions'.

Andrei Burdyka and another man were sentenced to death on 14 May for crimes committed during an armed robbery in Grodno in October 2009. Both were convicted of premeditated murder, armed assault, arson, kidnapping of a minor, theft and robbery. On Monday, Burdyka's mother visited the prison where her son had been held. She was told he had been shot and was handed his clothing and glasses. Neither of the families was officially informed of the executions.

In Belarus, prisoners on death row are told they will be executed only moments before the sentence is carried out. They are shot in the back of the head. The body is not handed over to the family, who are often informed only afterwards, and the place of burial is kept secret, causing further distress to relatives.

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