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Dear Yevhen Bystrytsky,

Action in support of Igor Koktysh

I am writing to you on the request of Irynna Tyutyunik the wife of Igor Koktysh who is currently detained in Ukraine with a view to extradition to Belarus.

Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action in October 2007 on behalf of Igor Koktysh asking the Ukrainian authorities not to deport him to Belarus where he would be at risk of the death penalty. Igor Koktysh, who is a rock musician, was accused of having murdered the relative of a close friend in Baranovici in Belarus in January 2001. Before his arrest, he had been actively helping young people in Baranovici to combat drug addiction and other social problems. He had antagonized local police by organizing rock festivals, and when he set up a Catholic youth organization, the local police asked him not to register it. When he persisted, he was threatened and told that the police would find a reason to arrest him. In January 2001 a relative of a close friend was murdered and Igor Koktysh was detained and accused of the murder. During the year he spent in police detention awaiting trial, he was allegedly subjected to beatings, torture or other ill-treatment, such as placing him naked in a freezing cell and depriving him of necessary medication for his asthma, to force him to confess to the murder. On 7 December 2001, the Brest district court found him not guilty, and this decision was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Belarus on 1 February 2002. The Prosecutor General of Belarus appealed against the verdict on 11 April 2002 and the case was returned to court for a re-trial. Igor Koktysh left Belarus in October 2003 and moved to Ukraine. On 25 June 2007, Igor Koktysh was detained by Ukrainian police to await extradition to Belarus. He is charged under article 139, part 2 of the Criminal Code of Belarus with "premeditated, aggravated murder", which carries the death sentence.

Amnesty International has recently written a report about the death penalty in Belarus (EUR 49/001/2009, *Ending executions in Europe: Towards abolition of the death penalty in Belarus*, March 2009). During research for that report we found credible evidence of the use of torture and ill-treatment to extract confessions which support the allegations made by Igor Koktysh. There is also credible evidence that human rights defenders and others engaged in opposition activities may be targeted or face reprisals because of their activities. Following our action the European Court of Human Rights instructed the Ukrainian authorities, under Rule 39, that Igor Koktysh should not be extradited to Belarus. Amnesty International remains concerned about the prolonged detention of Igor Koktysh and continues to monitor his case.

Yours sincerely

Heather McGill
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Europe and Central Asia Programme

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