

Testimony of Viktor (28 y/o), Minsk

I have always been a fairly active and engaged citizen. I did not accept the falsified results of this year's presidential elections. Beginning on August 9, my soul was troubled by injustice and could not allow me to stay home. And on August 10, I decided to go to the city with my friends. We came to one of the sites of Minsk, where thousands of like-minded individuals and kindred souls got together. Everyone was clapping their hands, chanting slogans and cheering one another. People blocked the intersection from all sides with their own cars thereby obstructing passage of military vehicles and other security forces. After some time, all of the sudden, a large number of stun grenades began exploding right before my eyes in the middle of the crowd at the center of the intersection. Of course everyone began fleeing the area, but unfortunately, not everyone was able to escape — people suffered various degrees of injury. This means that militiamen dressed in civilian clothing had snuck their way into the crowd of peaceful protesters and then just threw the grenades at the people from within without thinking that they would kill people or leave them disabled. That night my friends and I made it home safely.

The next day (August 12), my friends and I figured to head to the city and make some noise at the peaceful protest. We drove around the city and honked the car horn demonstrating our disagreement with and resentment of the falsification of the election results, resentment of the dictatorship and of the disrespectful attitude towards the people. People's taxes are the main source of the government's treasury. This means that it is with our taxes that the president maintains his entourage and security forces. These very security forces, in turn, are prepared to take down anyone, who is against the ruling authority. And to do so they are using all possible special means including firearms.

After the demonstrations, I and the three friends of mine (two guys and a girl) stopped at the late-night fast food place to replenish our energy. After that we headed in the direction of my home; and two kilometers from home we stopped at the read light at the intersection. Diagonally across from us there were many people in black as well as detention vehicles and army trucks parked along the road. Standing at the center of the intersection five people in black uniforms

without insignia and in masks pointed their weapons at my friends and me and ordered us to freeze. Using profane language, they forced us to slowly get out of the car and pushed us onto the pavement. The enforcers searched the trunk and the interior of the car. They did not find anything illegal. Using profanity, they forced us to unlock our phones. They began with the driver — they did not find anything suspicious on his phone. On the phone of our female friend there was a video from the noise protest that she had recorded earlier that evening from inside the car. The coordinator with the radio ordered the rest of the enforcers: “Pack these ones up!” They twisted our arms behind our backs, put the plastic zip ties on our wrists, picked us up from the pavement and dragged to the detention vans.

They led us to the van, on the other side of which there was a great number of people dressed in black. They wore no insignia and their faces were covered with black masks. They led me first. Unknown people in black uniforms momentarily came at me as if they had been mad. They began hitting me with the batons and I received about 15 to 20 blows on the back, arms, buttocks, and on the head! Then I was ordered to quickly get inside the van, where I fell and ended up lying on top of three, four, or even five layers of people, who had been beaten up and loaded into the vehicle prior to us. Right away I heard the order to climb up and then to the corner furthest from the door; I received a couple blows on the back and buttocks. The entire trip was accompanied by the blows with the batons and kicks with the feet. And those, who were lying on top, understandably, were pressing with their weight on those who were on the very bottom, on the floor. Detained people were moaning, wheezing, making awful sounds in pain.

I managed to notice that inside the van there were five people in black uniforms wearing masks. People lying on the bottom were suffocating. Some detainees had epileptic attacks. Some could not breathe and were asking for help. But in response to people’s pleas for help and complaints about feeling unwell, men in black uniforms were stumping on top of the people, stepping on the heads, and squeezing them closer together. Throughout this entire time, we were peppered with insulting language, humiliated, and threatened with physical violence. The people in black uniforms cut the long hair of the detainees and yanked out the earrings from the ears of the young men. Those, on whom the [people in black uniforms] spotted the tattoos and those who had backpacks or the bags with first aid kits, those who wore gloves, masks, or respirators were

beaten with particular prejudice and were subjected to physical torture. I heard a phrase: ‘These people will go through a special program’.

People in black uniforms were very aggressive. They were battering us with particular cruelty. They beat us a lot. In response to any attempt to address them we were receiving baton blows. For the sake of our safety, in order to receive as few blows as possible, we had to stay quiet and put up with this harassment. The eyes looking from inside the masks seemed unnatural - the pupils were large, black and dilated. Only after I had been released, I learned that the OMON militiamen had been taking psychotropic substances.

After having travelled for some short period of time, I and the other detainees — about forty people — began being transferred into a yellow bus “MAZ”. My friend, Pavel, yelled out, “Guys, don’t hit me on the head, I am an engineer,” after which he momentarily received two blows with a baton on the head. Throughout the process of transfer to the bus, physical assault continued — people in black uniforms formed a corridor, within which they continued battering all the detainees as we moved through it towards “MAZ.” I understood right away that the faster one moves through this corridor, the lower are the chances to receive a blow. However, when I was already climbing inside the bus through the middle door, someone yanked me back out into the street, forced me to the ground, and then four or five people began punching as if they had been mad.

After this I crawled into the bus. But even inside, lying on my stomach I was receiving punches on my buttocks and thighs; and in an almost unconscious state I dragged myself to the front of the bus, closer to the driver’s side. I think I received about 50-60 blows with the baton on my arms and legs. After some time, the same scheme with the use of violence and corridor formation was repeated to transfer us from “MAZ” to yet another van.

Five of us were placed into a small room — which resembled a closet — and locked the door. From the lack of oxygen and affected by claustrophobia, I began fainting. But to my requests to open the door and let us breathe no one reacted. Then, I and two other people were brought to an unfamiliar place, where the militiamen in black and dark blue uniforms formed the

corridor and made us run through it one by one. They chased us along the wall to the other side of the corridor and hit us with batons as we ran past them. We were allowed to stand on our knees or to squat. Our hands were tied behind our backs with the plastic zip ties. I would like to note that physical assaults and threats continued throughout this entire time. Many detainees were passing out. They were — and to this day are — in grave condition.

Then we were ordered to form a single file and told to walk through this unfamiliar building one by one. Each of us was given a plastic bag and ordered to place our belongings into the bags and hand them to the militiamen. After that, some of the detainees — about one hundred of us — were placed into a room with concrete walls, concrete floor, and metal bars for ceiling. There were neither toilets nor any other amenities. I calculated that we were in that room from 1:40pm until 10:00pm — standing on our feet or squatting on a concrete floor. After 10pm they led us out from that ‘stall’ into the building, where they placed us into a cell. The cell was meant for five people (it was meant to sleep five people), but at the moment there were at least 35 of us in it. Ventilation in the cell was absolutely terrible, it was impossible to breathe. The only water there was to drink was tap water. There were no mattresses, no pillows — just bare wooden bunks. The sink was covered with scraps of laundry soap. The food was very scant: water and bread. Although one evening they did give us some buckwheat porridge with a meat cutlet and the next day we got rice porridge with a piece of mackerel. For all the detainees it was a fest.

The young guys in my cell were fairly adequate. Everyone was friendly towards one other and treated each other with compassion. On day one of my detention, I was lying on the bunk from morning well into the evening, without getting up even once — I was hurting after all those blows and punches of the militiamen. I used a hoodie for the pillow and the socks to cover my eyes so that the bright beams do not shine into my eyes as strongly — the bright light in the cell was on even at night. Everyone who was in the cell with me treated me with compassion. No one attempted to kick me off the bunk because they saw how unwell I was. Actually, quite the opposite, people were bringing me food and water, and even washed the dishes after me. I am very grateful to them for this. Everyone else slept on a bare, dirty floor, with shoes under their heads instead of pillows. There was a guy who had stood in the ‘stall’ all night long and who was

diagnosed with a spinal fracture only in the early afternoon — the ambulance took him to the hospital.

Throughout the day, the militiamen were coming up to our cell (as well as to the other cells) and reading out the list of last names. People, whose last name coincided with the last name on the list, were led out into the hallway. Then they were sent to the local court. From the words of other people, who were detained with me, I can explain what was happening in court: the judge read out the detention protocol, which was filled with complete nonsense and the content did not correspond to reality; those who agreed to sign such a protocol were handed a 10-day jail term; those who chose to defend their position and refused to sign the protocol were punished with a 15-day jail term. There were cases when people were given 20-days. The entire process was supervised by the Pretrial Detention Facility warders and for this reason very few people tried to prove their innocence — to avoid physical punishment. After being sentenced, the detainees were brought back to the cells; and after some time they were sent to the regional penitentiaries to serve their sentences.

On the night of 12-13 August we heard and saw how newly detained people were being brought into the courtyard of Okrestina. We heard them whimper in pain when they were being unloaded, beaten up, and forced to kneel on the pavement along the wall...

I was in the cell of the pretrial detention center from 10:10pm of August 12 until 5:00pm of August 13. The staff member of that facility called out my last name from behind the closed door, after which he led me out of the cell into the hallway and together with the other detained people I was escorted to the 4th floor of the building. Each of us was invited into a separate room. In the room there were two young men, who did not introduce themselves. They asked me to stand against the wall, turned on the video recording and warned me not to partake in any unsanctioned protests. Then I signed a warning and a notice to appear at the Court of Saviecki District of Minsk on September 4, 2020.

After this, all the detainees — about 40 of us — were led into the courtyard of the detention center and lined us up along the frieze facing the wall, with our hands behind our heads

or backs. We stood in this position for approximately six hours. Then arrived the two brigades of emergency medical personnel and the detainees, those with health concerns as well as those without any, took turns to come up to the medics. After this we were escorted to the exit gate of the detention center. This is how I was released on August 13 at 11:34pm. I believe I was one of very few people who were lucky enough to be released after such a short period of time.

Throughout my detention I was subjected to illegal and unjustified abuse, which resulted in a serious bodily injury as well as mental and emotional anguish. My physical condition was so severe that for a moment I lost consciousness. The medical examination attested the following bodily injuries: mild traumatic brain injury, concussion, rib cage contusion, back hemorrhage, bruising of the right and left shoulders, bruising of the left forearm and right ulna, bruising of the gluteal area, bruising of both hips and both shins.

On August 28, I called the Saviecki District court and was told that no hearing is scheduled for someone with my last name. I then filed a complaint with the prosecutor's office as well as with the Investigative Committee of Minsk requesting to carry out an investigation and shed light onto the situation.