

Belarus Candidate Tells of Torture

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Mikhalevich

MINSK — A former Belarussian presidential candidate said Monday that he was beaten, stripped naked and hung by his hands while in the custody of secret police.

Ales Mikhalevich said he has sent a letter to the United Nations Committee Against Torture describing his treatment at the hands of secret police, which still uses the Soviet name KGB.

During his two months in prison, he was deprived of sleep and forced to spend long periods in a freshly painted cell without ventilation, Mikhalevich said. He said that following his torture he was forced to sign a paper in which he pledged to cooperate.

"After my joints crunched I did all they wanted," he said at a news conference.

KGB spokesman Alexander Antonovich rejected Mikhalevich's claim.

Mikhalevich and six other presidential candidates were among more than 700 people arrested after massive protests against fraud in the Dec. 19 vote in which President Alexander Lukashenko was re-elected. International observers said the vote was rigged.

More than 30 of those detained, including two presidential candidates — Andrei Sannikov and Nikolai Statkevich — have remained in custody.

Valentin Stefanovich of the Vyasna rights center on Monday voiced concern about Statkevich's condition, saying neither his lawyers nor his family had been allowed to see him for nearly one month.

"I want to do all I can to save those who have remained behind bars and end torture," Mikhalevich said.

The European Union responded to the flawed vote and repression against the opposition in Belarus by saying it would freeze assets and ban travel for 156 top Belarussian officials. The United States also expanded its list of Belarussian officials subject to travel restrictions, banning business with two subsidiaries of a state-owned Belarussian petroleum conglomerate.

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