

Belarus Opposition Leader Says Year of No News From Jailed Husband

By [AFP](#)

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Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office / Flickr / CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Exiled Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya said Friday she has not heard from her jailed husband for a year, describing the lack of communication as a form of torture.

She called on UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to intervene, saying that other Belarusian political prisoners had also been cut off from the outside world.

"It's been a year since I last heard from my husband Syarhey Tsikhanouski. Since then, it has only been silence. No letters, no phone calls, no visits of lawyers," Tsikhanouskaya told reporters in Vilnius.

"I only received anonymous letters claiming that he had passed away and video that was published last year where I can barely recognize my own husband," she added.

Tsikhanouskaya, who claimed victory against longtime Belarusian leader Alexander

Lukashenko in the 2020 presidential election, has lived in exile in Lithuania since authorities staged a violent crackdown on protesters disputing the vote results.

A number of top opposition leaders are in jail. Tsikhanouski was sentenced to 18 years in prison in 2021 for "organizing riots and inciting social hatred."

"Being incommunicado is a form of torture ... not only for our political prisoners, but also for their families, who live in uncertainty and don't want to believe in the worst," Tsikhanouskaya said.

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She said the death of Russian anti-corruption crusader Alexei Navalny in an Arctic prison last month had only resulted in talk and no action.

"So far we can only hear words of condemnation and concern. We must take action to prevent further tragedies. The torture of people in prisons must stop," she said.

"I am calling on the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to intervene. Demand the end of the brutal practice of keeping people incommunicado," she added.

"Political prisoners must be granted access to adequate medical care and allowed communication with their lawyers and families."

Minsk has been subjected to sanctions over its clampdown on the opposition and for its role as a staging post in Russia's war on Ukraine.

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