

Brief assessment of the actions of the Belarusian law enforcement bodies against protesters in Minsk on 9-13 August 2020

Based on the results of a study of the diagnoses of people delivered to medical institutions in Minsk by ambulance during outdoor events on 09.08.2020 – 13.08.2020

Source: List of people who applied for medical help in connection with holding protest events 09/08/2020 – 13/08/2020

18 August 2020

Summary of findings

The document, presented in the form of several tables broken down by the dates of ambulance delivery to medical institutions or the independent application of patients to medical institutions, contains brief information about the name, patronymic, surname, age, and gender of patients; time and place of application for medical assistance; citizenship, address of residence in the Republic of Belarus; a preliminary diagnosis made by the ambulance team; the name of the medical institution where the patient was sent (delivered) for assistance; and the diagnosis made in the medical institution based on the results of an examination.

In total, the document contains data on 347 patients, including:

- 80 people delivered or admitted at 20:30 on 09.08.2020
- 17 people delivered or admitted at 08:00 on 10.08.2020
- 4 people, delivered or admitted at 15:00 on 10.08.2020
- 94 people delivered or admitted from 20:00 on 10.08.2020
- 80 people delivered or admitted from 06:00 on 11.08.2020
- 69 people delivered or admitted from 06:00 on 12.08.2020
- 3 people delivered or admitted from 06:00 13.08.2020

The patients included 29 women and 318 men. The youngest patient is 16 years old, the oldest is 74 years old. Some patients' age was not specified. Among the people included in the tables are one police officer (diagnosed with "dislocation of the wrist") and the remaining 346 are private citizens.

A significant number of patients were delivered by ambulance teams from the streets where protests were taking place, including ul. Nemiga and neighboring streets, prosp. Pobediteley, prosp. Masherova, the area around the "Minsk – Hero City" monument, ul. Gvardeyskaya, ul. Kalvariyskaya, ul. Griboyedova, ul. Pritytskogo and other streets around the Pushkinskaya metro station, prosp. Nezavisimosti, the Grushevka metro region, etc. In a small number of cases, remote residential areas of the city are indicated. In 30 cases, the places to which ambulances were called were the department of internal affairs or temporary detention centers, including the Center for Isolation of Offenders on 1st per. Okrestsin 36 (17 cases), Leninsky District Office of Internal Affairs (7 cases), Pervomaisky District

Office of Internal Affairs (4 cases), and the Central District Office of Internal Affairs (2 cases). In more than half of cases, the place of the application for medical assistance is not indicated.

Diagnoses can be divided into the following main types:

- death before the arrival of the ambulance team, at 22:35 on 10.08.2020, Pritytsky Square (one case);
- gunshot (bullet) wounds of the head and various parts of the body and limbs (including the chest, shoulder, forearm, thigh, lower leg, foot, buttocks, abdomen, including a penetrating wound of the abdomen with eventration of the small intestine, and the blind wounds) – dozens of cases;
- open chest trauma, penetrating chest injury;
- penetrating trauma of the chest with damage to the right middle lobe bronchus and the development of hemopneumothorax (entrance of blood and air into the chest);
- shrapnel wounds to various parts of the body, incl. face, neck, hand, forearm, thigh, knee joint, lower leg, groin, lower back, lower body, abdominal wall, buttocks, incl. penetrating shrapnel wounds and multiple shrapnel wounds – dozens of cases;
- explosive and mine-explosive injuries and injuries of various parts of the body, including crushing of soft tissue – dozens of cases;
- open pneumothorax (air entering into the chest);
- lacerations of various parts of the body and limbs, incl. scalp wounds – dozens of cases;
- cuts and stab wounds of various parts of the body and limbs, incl. multiple) – dozens of cases;
- thermal burns (by flame) of the upper and lower extremities and abdomen – several cases;
- chemical burns of the eyes – several cases;
- barotrauma of the ears (from impact by air pressure) – several cases;
- rupture of the tympanic membrane;
- hemotympanum (bleeding of the ear);
- condition after suffering an electrical injury;
- toxic effects of gases, vapors, fumes – several cases;
- craniocerebral trauma of varying severity (including closed and open) – many dozens of cases;
- brain concussion; hemorrhagic brain injury – dozens of cases;
- traumatic subarachnoid hemorrhage (SAH) of the brain with the formation of a meningeal hematoma, incl. acute hematoma – several cases;
- paraorbital hematoma – several cases;
- pneumocephalus (air entrance into the skull);
- fractures of various bones of the head and face (base of the skull, cranial vault, zygomatic bone, upper jaw, maxillary sinuses, dorsum, crown, frontal-parietal region, temporal region, including open traumatic fracture of the zygomatic bone) – dozens of cases ;
- fractures of the upper and lower extremities (open and closed, including comminuted and displaced bones), rib fractures – dozens of cases;
- compression fracture of a vertebrae;
- joint dislocations, damage to the capsular bags of the joints and displacement of the capsular-ligamentous apparatus of various joints, incl. cervical spine, incl. hemarthrosis of the joints of the extremities (blood entering the joint);
- blunt trauma to the abdomen;

- subcutaneous hematomas, bruising of various parts of the body and head and limbs, incl. extensive interstitial hematomas, incl. linear hyperemia, incl. with edema and blood induration of the gluteal regions, lumbar region, back of the thigh, neck, back and side of the chest, back of the shoulders, back of the elbow joint – many dozens of cases;
- bruises, bruised wounds, bruised abrasions of various parts of the body, head, and limbs – many dozens of cases;
- arterial hypertension, hypertensive crisis (several cases);
- diabetes mellitus, incl. with decompensation (delivered from the Center for Isolation of Offenders on 1st per. Okrestsin 36);
- convulsive epileptic seizure – several cases.

The vast majority of patients were diagnosed with combined and multiple injuries.

Data assessment

First of all, it is important to understand that these 346 people (excluding the police officer included in this list) are far from all the victims of the actions of law enforcement agencies during the protest actions in Minsk on 9-13 August 2020. We can say that these are the most severe cases which needed urgent treatment and ambulance delivery. As of the morning of 17 August, more than 700 people filed complaints about the illegal actions of law enforcement officers. It is likely that some people have (so far) not gone to doctors and did not file complaints. Moreover, not all detainees have been released from pre-trial detention facilities at the time of writing this analysis, and there are probably also many victims among them. Belarusian human rights organisations are now documenting cases of illegal actions of law enforcement agencies and the full picture will only be known later. Numerous testimonies of people who have suffered from the violence of law enforcement officers during protests and in places of preliminary detention, or who have witnessed them, as well as photo and video materials published in the media and social networks, significantly complement the picture and should be used in the preparation of more detailed reports and in the course of investigations. Estimates contained in this document are preliminary and based only on an analysis of the data for the period from 9 to 13 August.

One must also consider the fact that demonstrations took place in several dozen cities and towns in Belarus. For a more complete picture data across the country must be analysed.

To assess the actions of law enforcement officers, it is important to take into account the fact that, according to ample documentary evidence, the protest actions were predominantly peaceful and were not accompanied by assault on law enforcement officers, massacres, arson, attempted seizure of buildings or other violent actions. Rare cases of clashes with the security forces were not the goal of the protesters, were episodic in nature, and occurred in response to the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement. The brutal response of the law enforcement officers was not due to actions of the overwhelming majority of protesters and was clearly disproportionate and aimed at intimidating and punishing the protesters and others.

An analysis of the trauma and injuries indicated in the report clearly shows that they were the result of unlawful, disproportionate, and cruel actions on the part of law enforcement agencies during the dispersal of protests, during the detention participants and bystanders, during their transportation, and throughout their stay in places of preliminary detention.

A significant part of the trauma and injuries of the victims were apparently the result of physical violence by law enforcement officers using truncheons and other special equipment (craniocerebral trauma, concussion, hemorrhages under the meninges, skull fractures, fractures of the extremities, joint injuries, hematomas, bruises, etc.). Multiple injuries of this type in dozens of patients indicate that people who were under the total control of law enforcement officers and did not pose any danger were subjected to repeated and systematic violence. (As a rule, each detainee was attacked by a group of law enforcement officers.) The “linear” nature of hematomas and their spread throughout the body is further indication of the use of batons and is not the result of reciprocal collisions. There is no doubt that these actions were pathologically violent and sadistic.

The second group of trauma and injuries was evidently caused by firearms, seemingly rubber bullets, during the dispersal of protests. Dozens of people have been diagnosed with gunshot (bullet) wounds to the head and various parts of the body and limbs, including penetrating wounds to the chest and abdomen.

The third group of injuries seems to be due to stun (light-noise) grenades, which caused explosive and mine-explosive trauma and injuries to various parts of the body, including the crushing of soft tissue, shrapnel wounds to various parts of the body, lacerations, etc. in dozens of people, as well as thermal burns of the upper and lower extremities and torso, and barotrauma of the ear, including those with ruptured eardrums.

The fourth group is owing likely to the use of gas, which led to chemical burns of the eyes and the consequences of toxic effects on the body of gases, vapors, and fumes in many patients.

The last group of patients is people suffering from chronic diseases, including arterial hypertension, diabetes and epilepsy, whose condition was threatened due to the delayed provision of urgent medical care, including for those held in temporary detention facilities.

Numerous documentary evidence, including artifacts, as well as statements by officials confirm the widespread use of firearms with rubber bullets and blank cartridges, stun grenades, and tear gas by law enforcement officers.

Conclusions

Considering the data in aggregate, it can be confidently asserted that the actions of law enforcement officers during the protest actions, during participants’ arrest and transportation, and during their stay in places of preliminary detention were not only not motivated by the actions of the protesters and were disproportionate, but also certainly constituted torture and cruel and inhuman treatment. There is

no doubt about this. These actions were systematic, widespread, and endangered the health and lives of hundreds of people. Many victims appear to have sustained significant and long-term health damage. At least one person died from the actions of law enforcement officers, and now there is information about two more victims.

These actions of law enforcement officers are certainly not only unlawful and illegal but must also be qualified as crimes in accordance with international law and the laws of the Republic of Belarus. Those who issued orders to carry out these actions and their perpetrators should be held accountable.