



BRIEFING NOTE

BELARUS: PUBLIC BROADCASTING OF FORCED CONFESSIONS AS A FORM OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

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CREDITS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the context of massive human rights violations and international crimes committed in Belarus,¹ the public videos of forced confessions have become a culmination of institutionalized practice of humiliation and deterrence and a state bravado and public display of torture. The systematic and organised nature of broadcasting of forced confessions videos reflects a state's strategy of psychological control of the population and information manipulation. Through the public performance of coerced remorse and degradation, the state showcases torture as a legitimate tool and demonstrates absolute impunity. The public broadcasting with usage of public TV and online platforms as YouTube, Telegram etc allows to reach nation-wide and international audience and instill fear across society, suppress dissent, and reinforce authoritarian rule.

The current briefing note describes the practice in detail, including profile of victims, production and content of videos, dissemination and post-production. The videos target a wide spectrum of individuals: political and human rights activists, journalists, artists, students, teachers, trade unionists, and ordinary citizens who express their dissent or perceived as such by the state. Victimization is often arbitrary, triggered by private remarks, online comments, or participation in peaceful protests.

As demonstrated in the briefing note, production and broadcast of the confession videos are not ad hoc, but systemically organized. The process is centralized and involves dedicated facilities, technical equipment, personnel, coercive methods to compel participation, post-production and system of dissemination. Victims are frequently given a text to read or instructed what to say, with recordings repeated or rehearsed until they align with scripts. The final videos are often edited with official state symbols, background music, and other propagandistic visuals.

Recordings typically occur soon after arrest, when detainees are most vulnerable, often held incommunicado, and denied access to a legal counsel. They are usually filmed inside detention facilities operated by the State Security Committee (KGB), the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption (GUBOPiK) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, or local police. Victims report being beaten or psychologically abused during or just prior to filming.

The content of the videos reflects official narratives portraying victims as enemies of the state: victims are coerced into confessing to fabricated crimes, renouncing prior beliefs, implicating others, or disclosing personal, often stigmatizing information. Some videos are further degraded by humiliating costumes or staging. Scripted speech, unnatural tone, and visible signs of distress—bruising, fear, flat affect—underscore the involuntary nature of these statements.

Dissemination occurs across multiple official and state-affiliated platforms, including national television, official social media channels of state institutions, and pro-government Telegram accounts.

¹ See [Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-58-68-aev.pdf), 7 February 2025, A/HRC/58/68, providing evidence of crimes against humanity, specifically imprisonment and persecution, as well as violations of multiple human rights, including the prohibition of torture. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-58-68-aev.pdf>

The consequences for victims are severe and long-lasting. Survivors report anxiety, depression, and deep internal conflict, “identity collapse” and other long-term psychological consequences. The videos are sometimes used as evidence in criminal proceedings, violating the right to a fair trial and further entrenching injustice.

The document also provides a legal assessment of the practice demonstrating that such acts of public dissemination—particularly when carried out with punitive intent and resulting in serious mental suffering— constitute a violation of Article 16 (cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) of the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) and in some cases meet the threshold for torture as defined by Article 1 of UNCAT. In these cases, public dissemination forms an integral part of the abuse, weaponized to intimidate and punish.

Recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council, UN Special Procedures and Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, other international bodies and governments:

- Explicitly recognize the production and public dissemination of forced confessions as a standalone violation of Article 16 of the UN Convention against Torture and Article 7 of the ICCPR, constituting cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and assess each case individually in which the public confessions’ videos were used whether it reaches the threshold of torture as defined by Article 1 of UNCAT;
- Call on Belarus to cease immediately the practice of producing and broadcasting forced confessions videos, to remove all such materials from public access and delete the videos from servers and storage devices owned by the government, and encourage private companies to follow that example;
- Urge the Belarusian authorities to initiate prompt, thorough, impartial, and independent investigations into all allegations of forced confessions, including the circumstances of their extraction and dissemination; and to ensure that perpetrators at all levels, including those with supervisory or command responsibility, are held accountable in accordance with the principle of command responsibility;
- Urge Belarus to ensure effective remedies and reparations to victims, including public apologies, compensation, psychosocial support, and measures for digital redress (e.g., permanent removal of videos and digital rehabilitation).
- Call for the preservation of digital and testimonial evidence of forced confessions to support potential accountability mechanisms, including international justice forums; encourage analysis of these practices by international human rights bodies and examine the chilling effect of such practices on civil society, media, human rights defenders, and broader public dissent.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the violent suppression of peaceful protests following the fraudulent presidential election in Belarus in August 2020, the country has experienced an unprecedented human rights crisis. The authorities have carried out widespread and systematic violations, including arbitrary detention, torture, extrajudicial executions, and politically motivated prosecutions. In 2024 the UN Committee against Torture has concluded its article 20 inquiry procedure on Belarus confirming that torture is a systematic practice in Belarus.² According to the UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus, the scale and coordination of these abuses have reached the threshold of crimes against humanity.³

Among the most degrading forms of abuse is the state-led production and dissemination of forced confession videos⁴ demonstrating torture and humiliated individuals to wide audience. Individuals detained on politically motivated charges are filmed admitting to crimes they did not commit and disclosing personal, often stigmatizing, information. These recordings are then publicly broadcast via state-controlled media and official social media channels, transforming forced confessions into a tool of both repression and propaganda. Many of these videos remain available online or stored on electronic media for prolonged periods, thereby entrenching and prolonging the experience of humiliation. Victims face additional social harm due to forced outing, public shaming, and reputational destruction within their communities and society.

Similar practices have been documented in other authoritarian countries, such as Iran⁵, North Korea, Vietnam,⁶ China⁷, Russia⁸, Uzbekistan⁹, and Tajikistan¹⁰. In Eastern Europe Belarus has gone the furthest in institutionalizing the use of forced confession videos. This practice has become a routine “ritual” of psychological violence of detainees and their families, deeply embedded in the machinery of state repression.

² UN Committee against Torture, [Report of the UN Committee against Torture](https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/094/28/pdf/g2409428.pdf), 77 session, 78 session, 79 session, A/79/44, 2024, para 46, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/094/28/pdf/g2409428.pdf>

³ Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, [Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-58-68-aev.pdf), 7 February 2025, A/HRC/58/68, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-58-68-aev.pdf>

⁴ Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, [Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-58-68-aev.pdf), 7 February 2025, A/HRC/58/68, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-58-68-aev.pdf>

⁵ FIDH, [Orwellian State: Islamic Republic of Iran's State Media as a Weapon of Mass Suppression](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/iran749aweb.pdf), June 2020, <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/iran749aweb.pdf>

⁶ Human Rights Watch, [Vietnam: US Citizen in Televised ‘Confession’](https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/18/viet-nam-us-citizen-televised-confession), July 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/18/viet-nam-us-citizen-televised-confession>

⁷ Safeguard Defenders, [Scripted and staged: Behind the scenes of China's forced TV confessions](https://apo.org.au/node/141086), April 2018, <https://apo.org.au/node/141086>

⁸ RSF, [RSF urges Russian and Belarusian authorities to end practice of forced confessions by journalists](https://rsf.org/en/rsf-urges-russian-and-belarusian-authorities-end-practice-forced-confessions-journalists), 23 June 2021, <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-urges-russian-and-belarusian-authorities-end-practice-forced-confessions-journalists>

⁹ Amnesty, [Secrets and Lies: forced confessions under torture in Uzbekistan](https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/eur_62_1086_2015_uzbekistantorture_fullreport.pdf), 2015, https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/eur_62_1086_2015_uzbekistantorture_fullreport.pdf

¹⁰ OMCT, [Tajikistan: Arbitrary detention of prominent human rights defender Ulfathonim Mamadshoeva](https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/arbitrary-detention-of-prominent-human-rights-defender-ulfathonim-mamadshoeva), 31 May 2022, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/arbitrary-detention-of-prominent-human-rights-defender-ulfathonim-mamadshoeva>

The UN Convention against Torture¹¹ defines the extraction of confessions as one of the purposes of torture. The UN Human Rights Committee affirms¹² that any use of evidence obtained through torture or ill-treatment violates the right to a fair trial and that any evidence obtained under torture and other ill-treatment should be excluded. However, international human rights bodies have yet to fully address **the public broadcasting** of such confessions as **a standalone violation**, despite its connection to other human rights violations.

This briefing note is the result of a collaborative effort by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus (ICIT), and the Belarusian human rights organization Human Constanta. The purpose of the briefing note is to draw attention of international human rights bodies to the systematic broadcasting of forced confession videos in Belarus. It provides a legal analysis not only of the violence used to extract these confessions, but also of the public dissemination of such videos as a distinct violation of the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

This briefing note is based on eleven interviews with survivors who were subjected to these practices; analysis of publicly available forced confession videos and related evidence; a psychological assessment of the consequences for a survivor, conducted in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol; and findings from the previously published *“Study on the Impact on Individual Integrity: Analysis of Videos Containing Forced Confessions of Belarusians”*¹³ by the same authors.

The document provides an overview of the patterns of victimization, typical conditions under which the videos are recorded, common content and framing of the videos, dissemination channels, and impacts on victims. It also identifies the state institutions involved in the production and promotion of these materials. Finally, the briefing note offers a legal assessment of these abuses under norms prohibiting torture and ill-treatment and related violations such as the rights to privacy, fair trial, and freedom of expression.

¹¹ OHCHR, [Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading), 10 December 1984, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading>

¹² UN Human Rights Committee, ‘General Comment No. 32 on Article 14, Right to a fair trial and equality before the law’, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/606075?ln=en&v=pdf>, para 36

¹³ International Committee on Investigation Torture in Belarus, [Study of consequences for a personality: analysis of the video of public confessions](https://torturesbelarus2020.org/video_tortures/), 2025, https://torturesbelarus2020.org/video_tortures/

II. CONTEXT AND PATTERNS OF THE PUBLIC BROADCASTING OF FORCED CONFESSIONS

This chapter elaborates the main patterns of public broadcasting of forced confessions produced and used in Belarus since 2020.

REASONS OF VICTIMISATION

Victims of the public broadcasting of forced confessions in Belarus include opposition figures, grassroots political and human rights activists, opinion leaders and activists from the cultural sphere¹⁴, academia, trade unionists, members of informal professional movements,¹⁵ journalists, members of political oppositional parties, political and civil society activists. This practice is also widely used against ordinary citizens who have expressed any form of dissent toward the Lukashenka regime¹⁶, including teachers, workers, students and retirees.

The criteria for targeting individuals are arbitrary: people may be selected simply for expressing discontent in private conversations, posting critical comments on social media¹⁷, or participating in peaceful assemblies. This indiscriminate approach reinforces the perception that no one is beyond the reach of state surveillance and retaliation.

Case of a female human rights defender:

"I heard someone nearby say, 'She needs to be shocked with a stun gun, that bitch,' followed by the sound of the stun gun. I was taken back through the corridors—to a room with Z symbols (note: symbols used by the Russian army in the context of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine) on a magnetic board and a green background for video recording. They sat me down near the door and released one hand from the handcuffs so I could 'fix my hair.' I was in very poor condition. Someone brought a cap with Lukashenka's symbols into the room, but they decided not to put it on me. Video cameras were pointed at me. A security officer asked if I had given interviews to 'extremist formations,'

¹⁴ BYSOL, Support for evacuated cultural activists Papa Bo and Max Crook, <https://bysol.org/en/private/papabo/>

¹⁵ Zerkalo, [Almost forty confession videos at one day: mass arrests of railway workers in Belarus](https://news.zerkalo.io/life/11969.html), 30 March, 2022, <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/11969.html>

¹⁶ Reform.by, [Law enforcement force Belarusians to record the confession videos for using Krapka.by](https://reform.news/siloviki-zastavljajut-belarusov-zapisivat-pokajannye-video-za-to-cto-polzovalis-bymapka-me), 23 May 2025, <https://reform.news/siloviki-zastavljajut-belarusov-zapisivat-pokajannye-video-za-to-cto-polzovalis-bymapka-me>

¹⁷ Telegram Kniga GU Baza, [Video of forced confession of a woman from Orsha](https://t.me/guBAZA/7627), 21 October 2024, <https://t.me/guBAZA/7627>

I said no. Then they asked about participation in protests, human rights activities, and some other things. In the end, they used only one segment of the recording for the Telegram channel, and for that part, they told me in advance exactly what to say.”¹⁸

Case of an anti-war activist protesting against Russian invasion of Ukraine:¹⁹

“I believe they recorded this video of me for their own amusement, to portray me as pathetic, pitiful, and intimidated. They were laughing while filming me—it was entertainment for them. From my perspective, it felt like sadism. It was extremely distressing to be recorded without my consent while under severe stress, and at the same time being beaten and humiliated. I see these videos as attempts to discredit individuals and degrade human dignity”.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE VIDEO RECORDING

The videos analyzed by OMCT and its partners were typically recorded by representatives of law enforcement agencies or reporters from state-controlled media outlets shortly after an individual’s arrest—often within hours—at a time when detainees were most vulnerable, isolated, and deprived of legal safeguards. These confessions were not obtained in the presence of legal representatives or independent observers, and detainees were not informed of their right to remain silent. At the time the videos were recorded, charges had typically not yet been brought against the survivors, and they did not know whether such charges would be filed or how the videos might later be used in criminal proceedings against them, which contributed to their emotional distress.

In all documented cases, individuals were threatened with further violence, harm to family members, or prolonged detention if they refused to comply. One survivor reported being subjected to beatings whenever his statements failed to fully conform to the expectations of the security officers²⁰.

Recordings were frequently made in detention facilities operated by law enforcement bodies, including the State Security Committee (KGB), the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption (GUBOPiK) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and local police departments. In some instances, forced confessions were filmed at victims’ homes, workplaces, or educational institutions²¹.

¹⁸ Interview with the victim, conducted by Human Constanta.

¹⁹ Interview with the victim, conducted by ICIT in September 2023 (KAT 1830)

²⁰ Interview with the victim, conducted by OMCT in April 2023

²¹ EuroRadio, [Lawyer Kolesova – Gudilina accuses Law Faculty of Belarusian State University in human rights violations](https://euroradio.fm/ru/yuristka-kolesova-gudilina-obvinyaet-yurfak-bgu-v-narushenii-prav-cheloveka), 24 May 2025, <https://euroradio.fm/ru/yuristka-kolesova-gudilina-obvinyaet-yurfak-bgu-v-narushenii-prav-cheloveka>

Case of a participant of peaceful protests²²:

“At the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime, I was brought into a room where there were many people. The security officers read a script to me and said that I had to repeat it while they recorded the video. It was complete nonsense—something that had nothing to do with me. I didn’t repeat part of the script. They took me out into the corridor, started beating me, and explained that I had to say the text anyway. Then they brought me back inside. The officer who acted as the cameraman said, “How are we supposed to film the video like this?”—referring to my visible injuries. The officers who had beaten me responded, “If needed, we’ll blur it, cut it out, or Photoshop it.” Everything was recorded on a mobile phone. During the recording, there were lots of security officers standing around, constantly making comments”.

Additionally, there have been reports of forced confession videos being recorded in detention facilities featuring individuals who had already been convicted. For instance, in June 2024, state television aired a video featuring Darya Losik, wife of imprisoned journalist Ihar Losik, who had been sentenced to two years in a penal colony for ‘facilitating extremist activities’.²³ The video, recorded inside the penal colony allegedly under psychological pressure, showed her claiming her husband had involved her in extremism, expressing regret, criticizing the opposition, and announcing plans to divorce him²⁴. She was released shortly after.

CONTENT OF THE VIDEO

Individuals in these videos deliver clearly scripted statements, closely aligned with official narratives. A feature of the videos is the compelled renunciation of past survivor’s beliefs or affiliations. The language used is frequently legalistic and formulaic, suggesting that the content is prepared or dictated by officials, rather than spontaneously recounted by the individuals concerned²⁵. Those interviewees who experienced this reported being forced to re-record the video multiple times if law enforcement officers were dissatisfied with their tone or wording²⁶.

In terms of content, individuals were typically coerced into performing several of the following actions within a single video:

- a. Admitting to participation in protests, posting comments on social media, or engaging in other forms of dissent;

²² Interview with the victim, conducted by ICIT in August 2023 (KAT 452)

²³ Human Rights Center Viasna, [Political Prisoners: Ihar Losik](https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/ihar-losik), <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/ihar-losik>

²⁴ Belarusian Association of Journalists, [Daria Losik, sentenced for support of her husband, blogger Ihar Losik, was released](https://baj.media/ru/vyshla-na-svobodu-darja-losik-osuzhdennaja-za-podderzhku-muzha-blogera-igorja-losika/), 25 July 2024, <https://baj.media/ru/vyshla-na-svobodu-darja-losik-osuzhdennaja-za-podderzhku-muzha-blogera-igorja-losika/>

²⁵ Guardian News, [Family members say Belarusian video confessions are clearly coerced](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvrVcTpipls), 26 May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvrVcTpipls>

²⁶ Interview with the victim, conducted by OMCT in April 2023

- b. Confessing to alleged “hostile activities” on behalf of foreign states²⁷ and/or accepting funding from foreign donors;
- c. “Admitting” to organizing or participating in terrorist and/or extremist activities²⁸;
- d. “Admitting” to drug use or commission of other criminal offenses;
- e. Disclosing real or fabricated personal information, such as family disputes, sexual orientation (e.g., identifying as part of the LGBTIQ+ community), medical diagnoses, salary amount or “admitting” to being a negligent parent;
- f. Expressing support for the current authorities, repenting for past protest activity, and denouncing the political opposition, civil society actors, and the protest movement;
- g. Providing information—often false—about other dissenters, including family members, colleagues, or friends, thereby placing them at risk of further human rights violations.

Case of a participant of peaceful protests²⁹:

“While I was lying face down on the floor, the officers printed out a script that I was supposed to read on camera. I refused. One of the officers then said they are given condoms in bulk, and half a minute later someone brought a baton with a condom stretched over it close to my face and asked, “Will you record now?” I responded, “Now of course I will.” One officer sat at a desk holding a large-print sheet that read: “I, [name], participated in protests and have been a habitual drug user for a long time.” They turned on the camera and I read the text aloud. I was in great pain from broken ribs and very frightened. They recorded several takes”.

In many cases, detainees appeared to exhibit visible signs of physical or emotional distress³⁰. The use of coercive methods prior to or during the recording is suggested by the presence of bruising, poor physical condition, unnatural posture, or a flat affect³¹. Additional indicators included elements of the recording environment itself—such as the setting, lighting, and the visible presence of law enforcement personnel.

²⁷ News.by, Sentenced to Death! Testimony of Germany terrorist Riko Kriger, marionette of SBU, explosion of railway, September 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUE1ev700io>

²⁸ Interview with the victim, conducted by OMCT in April 2023

²⁹ Interview with the victim, conducted by ICIT in August 2023 (KAT 795)

³⁰ Human Rights Center Viasna, [Since the beginning of the war at least eight ‘railway’ partisans have been detained](https://spring96.org/ru/news/107025), 09 March 2022, <https://spring96.org/ru/news/107025>

³¹ Operativno. Vazhno. Dostovernno., [One of the leaders of anarchist movement is detained](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLO8C2tg9QI), 12 November 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLO8C2tg9QI>

Excerpt from the psychological assessment of the victim shown in the forced confession video³²:

“The gaze is fixed at a single point straight ahead or downward. There are no oculomotor reactions that would typically indicate internal dialogue or self-reflection—processes that are generally present when an individual recounts and re-evaluates their own actions. The speech lacks natural intonation. Intonation would normally be present in a person speaking about a profound personal experience and undergoing a process of self-assessment or remorse.

The delivery is monotonous and measured; the gaze remains fixed in one direction throughout. These features strongly suggest an absence of voluntary speech. This, in turn, may be indicative of coercion—suggesting that [personal data] was compelled to recite a scripted text. This impression is reinforced by the grammatical completeness and structure of the speech, which comes across as dry, compressed, and emotionally flat. There is no intonation typically associated with the expression of personally significant information that carries serious legal consequences. There is also a lack of any facial expression that would be consistent with sincere remorse. In still frames taken from the video, [personal data] appears with a suffering or pained facial expression.

The video is overlaid with selected footage emphasizing so-called “mass unrest”: dozens of law enforcement officers with shields, flashes and smoke (possibly from stun grenades), physical altercations, individuals in black balaclavas and uniforms armed with batons, and unarmed civilians in ordinary clothing throwing objects at the black-clad personnel”.

There are documented instances in which survivors were forced to wear humiliating or absurd clothing. In some videos, degrading or sexually suggestive objects were placed near the individuals. Other incidents included the forced application of humiliating symbols and headwear, such as ridiculous hats, clown noses or other items affixed to the head or face during filming³³.

Case of a participant of peaceful protests:

“During the video recording, I was forced to tie a red-and-green scarf around my neck (note: the colors of the Lukashenka regime’s official symbols), and a postcard bearing state symbols was taped to my head. At some point, officers from the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime compelled me to wear underwear over my trousers and made degrading remarks, claiming that I was homosexual”³⁴.

³² Independent Psychological Assessment Report conducted by Ms Olena Volochai, forensic expert and psychologist, 27 November 2024

³³ Gazeta.by2006, [How GUBOPiK record the videos – testimony of Daniil Karankevich](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/cf8ANTLMt18), 3 February 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/cf8ANTLMt18>

³⁴ Interview with the victim, conducted by OMCT in April 2023

In cases where reporters from state-controlled media or security services were visibly present or audibly interacting with the detainee, the questioning appeared rehearsed and directed. The tone of questioning frequently led or pressured individuals toward conclusions that aligned with official narratives³⁵.

Many of these “confession” videos included propagandistic elements designed to enhance their ideological impact. These included patriotic music, imagery associated with the Lukashenka regime, military visuals, and voiceovers framing the confessions within a broader ideological context. Such cues served to reinforce the regime’s legitimacy while portraying the individual as either an enemy of the nation or as having been “redeemed” by the state authority.

DISSEMINATION CHANNELS

These videos are disseminated through a range of interconnected channels, all operating either directly under the control of the Belarusian authorities or in close coordination with state security agencies:

- **Government-affiliated Telegram and other social media channels.** These channels act as semi-official tools of state propaganda, amplifying the psychological impact of the videos and enabling their rapid spread. For instance, pro-government Telegram channels such as *GUBOPiK* and *Zheltye Slivy*³⁶ routinely posting such content.
- **Stated-controlled television.** One of the primary vehicles for dissemination is national state television, particularly channels such as *Belarus 1*³⁷, *ONT*³⁸, *BT*³⁹, and *CTV*⁴⁰. These broadcasters often air confession videos as part of news segments, investigative programs, or so-called “special reports.”
- **Official accounts of government bodies and state-run institutions.** In addition to television, confession videos are frequently published on official government websites, YouTube accounts and Telegram channels, including those operated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Investigative Committee. Also forced confessions are actively disseminated by Telegram and Youtube accounts of state national and regional⁴¹ media, and state-run educational institutions⁴².

³⁵ Operativno. Vazhno. Dostoverno., [One of the leaders of anarchist movement is detained](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLO8C2tg9QI), 12 November 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLO8C2tg9QI>

³⁶ A Telegram Challen *‘Zheltie Slivy’*, <https://t.me/zheltyeslivy>

³⁷ Belsat, *‘Belarus-1’ broadcasted an interview with a prisoner Daria Losik*, 8 June 2024, <https://ru.belsat.eu/81086572/po-belarus-1-pokazali-intervyu-s-zaklyuchennoj-darej-losik>

³⁸ Meduza, *‘I’ve been set up’ Belarusian state TV airs questioning of detained opposition journalist Roman Protasevich*, 3 June 2021, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2021/06/03/i-ve-been-set-up>

³⁹ Interview with the victim, conducted by OMCT in April 2023

⁴⁰ EUVSDISINFO, *Disinformation Fuels Hate on Belarusian TV*, 28 June 2021, <https://euvdisinfo.eu/disinformation-fuels-hate-on-belarusian-tv/>

⁴¹ Media IQ, *‘Confession’ videos are now at the local state media, State bodies joined the fight against subscription to non-state channels*, December 2022, <https://mediaiq.info/pokayannye-video-teper-i-v-rajonkah-gosorgany-podkljuchilis-k-borbe-protiv-podpisok-na-negosudarstvennye-resursy>

⁴² EuroRadio, *Lawyer Kolesova – Gudilina accuses Law Faculty of Belarusian State University in human rights violations*, 24 May 2025, <https://euroradio.fm/ru/yuristka-kolesova-gudilina-obvinyaet-yurfak-bgu-v-narushenii-prav-cheloveka>

Case of a volunteer from a public cultural foundation⁴³:

“The forced confession video recorded with me was published on the Telegram channel ‘Zhelye Slivy,’ along with photographs taken during a search of my home. Among the images was one showing money I had received from selling a car, as well as 100–200 Polish zloty (23-46 euro). The publication was captioned: “Polish agent receives zloty.” It was also accompanied by other degrading commentary”.

While platforms such as Instagram⁴⁴, Facebook, VKontakte, and YouTube⁴⁵ have also been used to disseminate forced confessions, Telegram is a particularly prominent platform for such content as the most pervasive and least regulated medium. These channels are leveraged to reach broader audiences and ensure viral dissemination, often accompanied by inflammatory language and hashtags intended to discredit the individuals featured. Reportedly, the government utilizes paid online advertising to promote this content⁴⁶.

III. LEGAL ASSESSMENT

The current chapter provides legal assessment of the practice of broadcasting of forced confession videos from the perspective of human rights obligations of Belarus,⁴⁷ focusing on prohibition of torture and ill-treatment.

PROHIBITION OF TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

Torture is defined in Article 1 of UNCAT as an act causing (1) severe pain of suffering, either mental or physical, (2) intentionally inflicted for a specific purpose (3) by public official or with his/her consent or acquiescence.⁴⁸ Ill-treatment is prohibited by article 16 of UNCAT. The types of treatment that constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are not defined under Article 16 and include the requirement of involvement by a public official. Often it

⁴³ Interview with the victim, conducted by ICIT in August 2023 (KAT 1695)

⁴⁴ Defenders.by, [Joint statement of Belarusian human rights organisations regarding dissemination of ‘confession’ videos by the Law Faculty of Belarusian State University](https://www.defendersbelarus.org/news/tpost/h7ue3rorh1-sovmestnoe-zayavlenie-belarusskih-pravoz), 31 May 2023, <https://www.defendersbelarus.org/news/tpost/h7ue3rorh1-sovmestnoe-zayavlenie-belarusskih-pravoz>

⁴⁵ Youtube Channel ‘Belarus is a country for life’, [Sofiya Sapega administrated extremist channel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9je5nmhbt0), 25 May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9je5nmhbt0>

⁴⁶ StopFake, [The Dirty Side of Advertising : Forced Confessions From Belarus on Youtube](https://www.stopfake.org/en/the-dirty-side-of-advertising-forced-confessions-from-belarus-on-youtube), 04 June 2021, <https://www.stopfake.org/en/the-dirty-side-of-advertising-forced-confessions-from-belarus-on-youtube>

⁴⁷ Belarus has ratified ICCPR in 1973 and UNCAT in 1987

⁴⁸ OHCHR, [Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading), 10 December 1984, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading>

is be difficult to define precisely between torture and ill-treatment, and the assessment is performed on each case individually.

Both prohibition of torture and ill-treatment are of non-derogable nature as the Committee against Torture clarified in its General Comment No 2: “ Experience demonstrates that the conditions that give rise to ill-treatment frequently facilitate torture and therefore the measures required to prevent torture must be applied to prevent ill-treatment. Accordingly, the Committee has considered the prohibition of ill-treatment to be likewise non-derogable under the Convention and its prevention to be an effective and non-derogable measure.”⁴⁹

As mentioned above neither UN treaty bodies nor Special Procedures of Human Rights Council have not yet made any assessment or decision on whether broadcasting of forced confessions amount to torture or ill-treatment as a standalone violation as that is relatively new practice involving digital technologies.

VIOLATION OF ARTICLE 2 AND/OR 16 OF THE UNCAT

While the specific assessment of torture and ill-treatment and violations of the Convention is conducted in each case individually considering all the factors, there are general patterns related to torture and ill-treatment elements observed in all the cases analysed.

1. SEVERE PAIN OR SUFFERING, WHETHER PHYSICAL OR MENTAL

A certified psychological expert involved in the study of the long-term effects of these practices in Belarus concluded⁵⁰ that victims are at significant risk of developing serious mental health disorders. Many survivors reported intense feelings of worthlessness and social isolation triggered by the public discrediting of their identities. In particular, the exposure of these forced confessions to mass audiences served to compound the harm and intensify the psychological toll.

Several interviewees described an existential crisis, or “identity fracture”, following the video recordings, which were made in the absence of legal counsel and under coercive conditions. Victims spoke of a sense of moral collapse, brought about by the realization that they had been forced to repudiate their ideals, renounce their past activities, or adopt positions under video recording that were entirely incompatible with their beliefs. This internal conflict was compounded by the knowledge that the videos were widely available to the public and would continue to shape perceptions of them indefinitely.

One of the survivors reported experiencing *“profound and distressing feelings of shame due to the publication and wide dissemination of the self-incriminating video, as well as the burden of having to continue living with the fact that he had agreed—under extreme duress—to something he fundamentally disagreed with and would never have accepted under normal circumstances.”*⁵¹

⁴⁹ UN Committee against Torture, General Comment No 2, 24 January 2008, <https://docs.un.org/en/CAT/C/GC/2>

⁵⁰ Independent Psychological Assessment Report conducted by Ms Olena Volochai, forensic expert and psychologist, 27 November 2024

⁵¹ Independent Psychological Assessment Report conducted by Ms Olena Volochai, forensic expert and psychologist, 27 November 2024

2. INFLICTED INTENTIONALLY

It is evident from the testimonies described above that the pain inflicted intentionally not only on every individual case, but that there is also a large-scale and systematically coordinated public dissemination of forced confessions—frequently accompanied by stigmatizing narratives, and degrading imagery. The practice is deliberate, intentional acts designed to punish and deter dissent, thereby constituting a component of a broader, state-sponsored strategy of repression.

Reports and patterns of conduct suggest that the orchestration and use of forced confessions are not only conducted intentional by executors, but are also fully authorized by, or carried out with the knowledge and approval of the Office of the self-proclaimed President. This underscores the political intent behind the practice.

3. PURPOSE

At the larger scale, beyond individual cases and through them, this practice serves multiple interrelated purposes. *First*, the dissemination of forced confessions functions as a powerful deterrent against public participation in protests or expressions of dissent. The public humiliation of detainees serves as a warning to others, reinforcing a climate of fear in which the costs of political and public expression are visibly high. This also represents a conscious display of impunity and absolute power by the authorities, intended to convey to the public that, after suppressing dissent, they are no longer subject to any constraints and can act at will against those who disagree with them. Individuals who witness such confessions are dissuaded from engaging in activism or voicing any criticism of the government.

Second, these forced confessions videos are instrumental in propagating the state's narrative that opposition and protest movements are illegitimate, foreign-influenced, or extremist in nature. By presenting detainees as confessing to collaboration with hostile actors or involvement in subversive activities, the government seeks to delegitimize civil society, human rights defenders, and political opponents. In doing so, the regime consolidates its authority while discrediting alternative voices and justifying continued crackdowns under the guise of national security.

Third, it is used to justify arbitrary arrests and detentions by portraying the targeted individuals as criminals or threats to national security. By eliciting and disseminating statements under duress—often following intimidation, physical coercion, or psychological pressure—the authorities seek to construct a public narrative of guilt without due process.

Fourth, the production and public dissemination of forced confession videos serve as a form of extrajudicial punishment directed at dissidents. In many cases, the individuals subjected to these recordings are not formally charged or convicted at the time of their appearance on camera. Instead, the forced confession itself becomes the punishment—a degrading spectacle designed to inflict reputational harm, psychological trauma, and social alienation. By coercing individuals into renouncing their beliefs, expressing loyalty to the regime, or implicating others, the authorities impose a deeply personal and public form of retribution. This punishment is not limited to legal consequences but extends to moral and emotional degradation, often affecting victims' families, careers, and communities. As such, forced confessions are not merely tools of intimidation or propaganda—they function as punitive acts aimed at breaking the will of political opponents and extinguishing dissent at its root.

4. INVOLVEMENT OF OFFICIALS

The practice of obtaining, producing, and disseminating forced confessions in Belarus is executed by state bodies operating under the centralized control of the executive authority. Available evidence indicates that the primary institutions responsible for these practices include the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption (GUBOPiK), a specialized unit under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the State Security Committee (KGB). Both entities are frequently implicated in the arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and coercion of individuals into giving self-incriminating statements. These agencies operate with impunity, in the absence of effective judicial or parliamentary oversight, and within a system where violence, coercion, and intimidation are normalized instruments of state repression.

VIOLATION OF ARTICLE 15 OF THE UN CAT

The Committee against Torture has consistently emphasized that Article 15 must be interpreted in light of the object and purpose of the Convention⁵², which is to eradicate torture and all practices that may incentivize, legitimize, or normalize it. While Article 15 explicitly concerns the inadmissibility of evidence obtained under torture in legal proceedings, its broader preventive rationale extends to prohibiting any use or dissemination of such evidence that may confer legitimacy on the act of torture or encourage its recurrence.

In this context, the public broadcasting of forced confessions—even when not introduced in judicial proceedings—can have profoundly harmful consequences. It may lend credibility to statements extracted under duress, contribute to the normalization of torture within the public sphere, and deter victims from seeking justice due to fear of retaliation or humiliation. Such practices ultimately undermine the integrity of the justice system by eroding the clear demarcation between lawful and unlawful evidence.

RELATED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

In addition to violating the prohibition of torture, it constitutes violations of several fundamental human rights such as right to a fair trial, the right to freedom of expression, and right to privacy.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

The cases analyzed demonstrate that, while not universally, forced confessions were in many instances subsequently used to fabricate administrative or criminal charges against the victims. The absence of adequate public oversight of judicial proceedings—particularly in the context of widespread international crimes committed against human rights

⁵² UN Committee against Torture, General Comment No 2, 24 January 2008, <https://docs.un.org/en/CAT/C/GC/2>

defenders—makes it difficult to determine the extent to which such “evidence” influenced the severity of court rulings and sentences. Nonetheless, two interviewees reported that screenshots from these confession videos were included in the evidentiary materials of their criminal cases and used to support the prosecution’s case⁵³.

The use of forced confessions obtained under torture is further exacerbated by the fact that victims and their lawyers are often deterred from challenging the admissibility of such evidence. This is due both to fears of escalating repression⁵⁴ and a widespread perception that such complaints are futile, given the clear lack of independence within the Belarusian judiciary⁵⁵.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY

In Belarus, the public dissemination of forced confessions is routinely accompanied by grave violations of the right to privacy. Security forces frequently go beyond forcing individuals to incriminate themselves or others—they compel them to disclose, on camera, personal or intimate details of their private lives, which may be either genuine or fabricated.

Particularly concerning is the deliberate focus on topics that are socially controversial or culturally stigmatized in Belarusian society, such as alleged homosexuality, domestic or familial disputes, and financial matters including income sources and personal expenditures. The intent behind such practices is to inflict reputational harm, destroy personal dignity, and subject the victims to public humiliation. This deliberate exposure serves not only as a method of punishment but also as a tool of social ostracization and stigmatization.

RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The public broadcasting of forced confessions by state-controlled media constitutes a serious violation of the right to freedom of expression. This right encompasses not only the freedom to express one’s views, but also the right to seek, receive, and impart information without interference by public authorities. The use of forced confessions in public media in Belarus represents a targeted attack on both individual expression and the public’s collective right to access truthful information.

By coercing individuals into making statements under duress and widely disseminating these confessions through official channels, Belarusian authorities are not only silencing dissent but also actively distorting the public information space. The involuntary nature of these statements, combined with the lack of context or independent verification, violates the public’s right to access accurate and reliable information.

⁵³ Interview with the victim, conducted by ICIT in August 2023 (KAT 452 and KAT 804)

⁵⁴ Human Rights Council, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet report on the situation of human rights in Belarus, 17 March 2022, <https://media.un.org/unifeed/en/asset/d271/d2719671>

⁵⁵ Human Rights Council, Report of High Commissioner for Human Rights, Situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential elections and in its aftermath, 4 March 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113582>

In this way, the psychological sufferings inflicted by production and broadcasting of forced confessions videos meet the threshold of ill-treatment, provided that it's inflicted intentionally with a specific purpose and by the state officials. The OMCT and its partners underscore that beyond the coercive methods used to extract confessions, the public dissemination of such statements—particularly when individuals appear visibly distressed, degraded, or humiliated—constitute itself a **separate and independent violation** of **Article 2, Article 15 and Article 16** of the UN Convention Against Torture and **Article 7** of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In particular cases, based on the factors on each specific case, this practice may also amount to torture. The practice also violates article 15 of UNCAT, and related human rights – right to fair trial, right to privacy, right to freedom of expression.

