

# BelarusBrief

News from the Belarusian Diaspora in the USA, MAY 2021 [aba-together.org](http://aba-together.org)

May 2021 marked 10 months since the start of protests against the rigged presidential elections of August 2020.

## REPRESSIONS IN BELARUS

Detained since August (out of population of 9.5mln): **>35,000**  
Detained in April: **at least 332**  
Politically motivated criminal trials in May: **at least 109**  
'Political prisoners': **454** (via [Spring96](http://Spring96))

On May 23 the Ryanair Flight FR#4978 from Athens to Vilnius carrying dissident journalist Raman Pratasevich was forced to land. As a result, there are currently no passenger flights between Belarus and European Union. Authorities released two confession videos under torture. (via [CNN](http://CNN))

**Belarus opens a criminal case against Tut.by, the largest independent, online media outlet** in Belarus, blocks its website, and detains everyone inside. (via [abcNEWS](http://abcNEWS), [Freejournalists.info](http://Freejournalists.info))  
Authorities raid a Minsk studio of the news channel Belsat and homes of its journalists (via [RFERL](http://RFERL), [Euronews](http://Euronews))

**The regime continues to kill.** After a police interrogation for participating in political protests, 17-year old orphan Dmitry Stahovski jumped out the window, blaming the pressure from the authorities for his death. (via [Reuters](http://Reuters)) Vitold Ashurak died in prison. (via [The Guardian](http://TheGuardian)) Stepan Latypov tried to commit suicide in court. (via [CNN](http://CNN)) Lyudmila Khlusevich who suffers from leukemia and will be tried for a comment in a social network wrote in a death note "I ASK THAT YOU BLAME THE STATE FOR MY DEATH." (via [Belsat](http://Belsat))

## INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

President Biden issued a statement calling for the release of Raman Pratasevich and hundreds of other political prisoners and for an international investigation of the diversion of Ryanair Flight FR#4978. (via [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov))

In her statement Press Secretary Jen Psaki underscored that the United States will continue to advocate for action against the Lukashenka regime for its "affront to international norms and undermining of democracy and human rights" (via [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov))

Several members of the U.S. Congress issued statements condemning the forced diversion of a commercial flight and called for Aleksander Lukashenka to be accountable for these violations of international laws and norms. (via [Twitter](http://Twitter), [FCFR](http://FCFR))

U.S. Senators Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), and Rob Portman (R-Ohio) held a joint press conference with Belarusian leader and activist Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya in Vilnius, Lithuania. (via [TheHill](http://TheHill))

In a recent interview, Julie Fisher, U.S. Ambassador to Belarus, noted that the 'West must respond in terms that Lukashenka is able to understand'. (via [Belsat](http://Belsat))

In a new publication Amnesty International reports about **brutal reprisals against students** and reveals the disruptive impact of the state's repression on academic life in Belarus. (via [Amnesty](http://Amnesty))

## BELARUSIAN DIASPORA

Twenty Belarusian communities in the US sent a joint letter in **support of Raman Pratasevich**. (via [aba-together.org](http://aba-together.org))

The Belarus Freedom Forum, on behalf of Belarusian-American communities, calls on President Biden, Vice President Harris, the US Congress, and the State Department to initiate an immediate investigation, demand Belarusian cooperation with the international community, and set consequences for the Lukashenka regime's diversion of Ryanair Flight #FR4978 and arrest of journalist Raman Pratasevich on May 23, 2021. ([BelarusFF](http://BelarusFF))

The Association of Belarusians in America (ABA) has formed in California. It unites community leaders from 25 cities across the United States. Its first membership meeting took place on May 16th, 2021, in Philadelphia, PA.

**Two claims have been filed by Belarusian citizens against President Alexander Lukashenko** and his security apparatus: one with Germany's Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, and the other with the International Criminal Court in The Hague. (via [Deutsche Welle](http://DeutscheWelle), [belaruswomen.org](http://belaruswomen.org))

In light of reports of police intimidation of people writing to political prisoners, it is crucial to send letters from abroad. "Support has no boundaries: how to write letters to political prisoners if you are outside of Belarus." (via [Spring96](http://Spring96))

For weekly news on Belarus, visit [BelarusFF.org](http://BelarusFF.org). You can [add your email](#) to receive weekly news summaries.

## BelarusBrief MAY 2021

In May, eleven Belarusian-American communities joined the Global Solidarity Picket with Belarus to voice their support of the detained journalists and the students on trial (via [RFERL](#)) and to urge the United States to make the release of Belarusian political prisoners its central demand of the Lukashenko regime.



In **Portland, OR**, Belarusians gathered in the Waterfront Park to mourn the passing of Vitold Ashurak and to show their support of the brave striking workers at BelAZ factory.



Belarusians in **Minnesota** held their rally on Irene Hixon Whitney Pedestrian Bridge to protest Russian interference in Belarusian internal affairs.



In **Denver, CO**, Belarusians expressed their support of friends and relatives back in Belarus in front of the Museum of Nature and Science.



On May 22, a group of protesters from New England held a rally at the New Hampshire State House in **Concord, NH**, drawing attention to human rights atrocities committed by Lukashenko.



May 21-23 Belarusian communities of **North Carolina** spent the weekend paddleboarding and hiking in Jackrabbit Mountain National Forests.



Belarusian diaspora of **Honolulu, HI**, met on Kapahulu-Zoo Trail near the "Surfer on a Wave" statue to urge the Belarusian government to release all political prisoners.