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*Translated from Russian by Kamila Orlova*

I was detained on August 10, at approximately 10:00 pm at the intersection of Pobeditelei Avenue and Mel'nikayte Street. That day the center of Minsk was cordoned off and nothing was happening there. In the evening, my girlfriend and I were out for a walk; when we reached the OMON (Russian acronym for a Special Purpose Police Unit) post, we saw that the OMON officers were letting people through and they were walking in the direction of the Great Patriotic War [i.e. WWII] Museum. Having noticed this, we decided to find out what was happening there. There were very few people at the center; much fewer than any other evening. The riot police officers demanded to see our backpacks - we satisfied their demand. Each of us had a respirator and a pair of regular swimming goggles. We had them with us because earlier that day the police had been dispersing people from the Pobeditelei Avenue with tear gas and its effect could be felt in the surrounding area even an hour after the cessation of hostilities on the part of the OMON. Moreover, it is not illegal to possess and carry these items. We did not have anything unusual on us. They let my girlfriend go, but having accused me of participation in post-election 'riots', they took me away. I resisted neither inspection nor arrest. Nobody was told where the arrested people were being taken. My family learned that I had been in the temporary detention facility only when I returned.

I was at the Akrestina detention center from August 10 - August 12.

In the cell, where I was held, people, one after another were losing consciousness. At the first symptoms of fainting in their cellmates, people were yelling out to the OMON officers to let them know what was happening. But the OMON's reaction to these cries for help varied. Sometimes they immediately dragged the person out of the cell — dragged out and never brought him back. But sometimes, they just ignored these cries and the person ended up losing all vital signs. People in the cells were witnessing the absence of breathing in their cellmates. Whenever the policeman did bother to come into the cell, he ordered the detainees to carry the bodies of unconscious people into the yard. One of the bodies was ordered to be simply placed on the grass. And the people who were ordered to carry out the bodies were then beaten with the truncheons and brought back into the cell.

We could often hear the screams of the people who were being pummelled in the corridors; we also heard how after some time their screams were fading away. When I was let out, I saw motionless bodies laying on the grounds of the detention center; there were also numerous ambulances and a van that was not meant for transportation of living people.

In one of the cells there were as many as one-hundred-and-twenty people at once. The area of the cell was approximately twenty-five square meters [269 sq. ft.] and it was located outdoors. In the other identical cell there were eighty detainees; but even with this lower number of people it was hard to sit down. Every once in a while we were taken out of the cells for profilaktika - i.e. the preventive measures.

These preventive measures consisted of systematic beating of the detainees with truncheons during which the officers instructed that we are not to shout Zhivie Belarus! [‘Жыве Беларусь!’/Long Live Belarus! - a motto widely used by the Belarussian protesters] and not to listen to our commanders. OMON officers were of the opinion that everyone who was taken to the Center for the Isolation of Offenders (CIO) was under the leadership of some numerous commanders. They were using precisely this word - the commanders. They were saying: “if you keep listening to your commanders and get in here for the second time, you won’t get off that easily.” This phrase sounded right after the final preventive conversation and prior to the release of a detainee. The riot militia officer was talking about some commanders, using the word in plural, and not about some one commander. The OMON at the CIO did not understand why the citizens of Belarus were protesting. To their mind, some commanders were coordinating the protesters’ clashes with the power structures. They cannot think of another way to explain to themselves how or why these sudden, local resistance points appeared in different parts of Minsk. The reality is that the detained protesters do not have any commanders. These are regular people, who can no longer put up with беспредел/lawlessness of the authorities.

The OMON police officers were forcibly grabbing people off the streets without differentiating between the protesters and passers-by. The arrested people were packaged into the prisoner transfer vans and treated with the same punitive measures. At the moment of the arrest the people had no bodily injuries. After the release, however, numerous signs of blows were recorded. And this scenario is the same for the majority of the detainees.

Arrests were taking place in the area where no protests transpired and the detainees showed no signs of aggression towards OMON. The same cannot be said about the riot policemen. If on the way from the transport van to the detention center a person stumbled, the policemen pounded him with a truncheon. If a person cannot stand up, they began to hit him even harder. It was impossible to know how long the beating would continue — whether until a person was losing consciousness or until he managed to get up — only the personnel of the detention facility could know that; the detainees were prohibited from looking any way but straight ahead.

Inside the detention center, prior to taking the detainees to the isolation cell, OMON checked whether among the arrestees there were minors or journalists. If minors and journalists were identified, they were immediately released. By night, the police officers were always beating the detainees. They beat everyone but especially those who accidentally fell or screamed in agony. It was a bit better by day: during the day you could be spared the blows if you managed to quickly and obediently do as they say. The isolation facility didn’t have even the basic facilities: there was no water, no toilet, no roof. Crammed in the tiny cells, the detainees had to spend at least twenty-four hours without food.

OMON does not consider the citizens of Belarus to be human beings. OMON police officers are trained to treat the detainees as inhumans. They are trained this way and they won’t budge. The only option in dealing with them is to submit so that they don’t hit as hard. Their training is based on disinformation about the real reasons behind people’s detention and they are convinced that all the detainees have resisted law enforcement officials.

