

Political Prisoners

from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine

It has been more than three years since the launch of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 – and over eleven years since the beginning of Russian aggression in 2014. This war has affected millions of innocent people, including political prisoners. Many remain unjustly imprisoned, often held in inhumane conditions in prisons and penal colonies, far from their families and loved ones.

The stories presented in this exhibition belong to real people – Nariman, Liudmyla, Iryna, Maryia, Volha, Arseny, Nadezhda. These are names that deserve to be spoken aloud. Their suffering is not a thing of the past but a continuing reality. Each of them has become a symbol of courage, resistance, and human dignity in a time of darkness.

But they are not alone. Hundreds of other men, women, and young people remain behind bars today in Russian, Belarusian, and occupied Ukrainian prisons. They face torture, isolation, psychological, and physical abuse – simply for dissenting, for speaking out, for wanting to live in freedom.

Political prisoners also exist in many other countries – Iran, China, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba, and elsewhere – where fundamental human rights are systematically suppressed. Their stories, too, deserve to be heard.

For Czech diplomacy, the protection of human rights and support for political prisoners have long been a key priority. As former Czechoslovakia, we have our own painful history of political imprisonment – when thousands of innocent citizens were persecuted

under Soviet rule for their beliefs and convictions. They were imprisoned, tortured, and killed.

This exhibition is not only about the past or the present. Above all, it is about our shared responsibility: to remember, to stay vigilant, to stand with those who cannot speak for themselves today.

Because freedom and democracy must never be taken for granted. Let us remember the stories that must not be forgotten.



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NARIMAN DZHELYAL (Ukraine)

Nariman Dzhelyal, the deputy chairman of the Medjlis (parliament) of the Crimean Tatars and the father of four children. He currently serves as Ukraine's ambassador to Turkey. In August 2021, he participated in the international meeting of the Crimean Platform held in Kyiv. Upon returning to Russian-occupied Crimea in September, he was arrested. The Russian secret service FSB kept him handcuffed, with his head covered. Throughout his detention, he was subjected to psychological pressure and inhumane treatment. He was later accused of involvement in a sabotage attack on a gas pipeline near Simferopol.

On 21 September 2022, the Russian-controlled Supreme Court of Crimea found Dzhelyal guilty of sabotage and sentenced him to 17 years in prison along with a fine of 700,000 rubles. Thanks in part to international pressure, including the efforts of Czech diplomacy and non-governmental organisations, he was released in 2024 as part of a prisoner exchange between Russia and Ukraine. After his release, he visited Prague, where he personally thanked the Czech public for their support. He now lives in Europe and continues to advocate for the rights of Crimean Tatars and the future of Crimea after the war.



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Вікторія Рошина
Арештована: 2023 р.
Під час поїздки на окуповані території зник. У березні 2022 року Рошина була затримана представниками ФСБ РФ.

Viktoriya Roschyna
Arrested: 2023
After August 3, 2023, during a trip to the occupied territories, contact with the journalist disappeared. In March 2022, Roschyna was already detained by representatives of the FSB of the Russian Federation.

LIUDMYLA HUSEINOVA (Ukraine)

Liudmyla Huseinova, who was arrested by Russian authorities in 2019 for her pro-Ukrainian stance, spent more than three years in a Russian prison. She was subjected to inhuman treatment, torture and sexual violence. In 2021, while still imprisoned, she received a state award for her personal contribution to the protection of human rights and for her work within the human rights movement in Ukraine.

Since her release, she has been actively advocating for the freedom of women who remain imprisoned in Russia, where they continue to face torture, sexual violence, and death. These women's voices must be heard, and their stories must not be forgotten.

On 17 October 2022, she was released as part of a large-scale prisoner exchange between Ukraine and Russia.



Ірина Данилович
Арештована: 2022 р.
Засуджена у фальсифікованій справі за пристроєм до 7 років позбавлення волі. За пережилу інсульт і втратила слух на одне вухо.
Термін арешту: до 7 років позбавлення волі за штрафу відповідно до ст. 222.1 УК РФ.

Iryna Danylovych
Arrested: 2022
Convicted in a falsified case for possession of a device for 7 years in prison. During her imprisonment, she lost hearing in one ear.
Term of arrest: up to 7 years of imprisonment and fines in accordance with Art. 222.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

political prisoner



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IRYNA DANYLOVYCH (Ukraine)

A citizen journalist and activist, and a nurse by profession, she has highlighted problems and corruption in the healthcare sector in Russian-occupied Crimea and covered politically motivated trials there for independent media.

In April 2022, she was abducted at a bus stop by members of the Russian secret service, the FSB, as she was returning from work. For nearly two weeks, no one knew where she was.

Through beatings and coercion, the investigators forced her to sign a confession to alleged illegal trade, transportation, and storage of explosives. Based on manipulated evidence, the court sentenced her to seven years in prison.

Denied medical care in prison, she went on a hunger strike. According to her family, she has become completely deaf in one ear and suffers from other health issues that prevented her from even attending her appeal trial.



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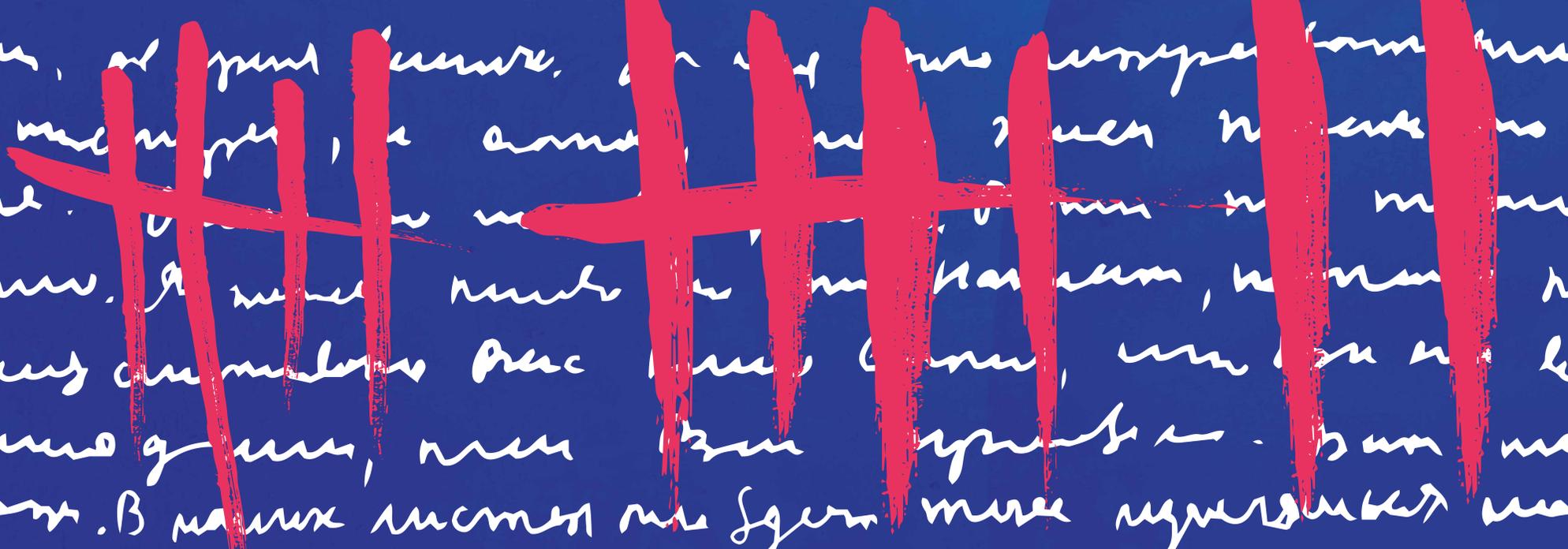
MARYIA KALESNIKAVA (Belarus)

A musician by profession, she was one of the leading figures in the Belarusian democratic movement during the August 2020 presidential election and in the subsequent mass protests against the rigged election results. She first led the staff of opposition candidate Viktor Babaryka.

Following his arrest, she joined the team of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Tsikhanouskaya is a Belarusian politician and activist who ran against dictator Alyaksandr Lukashenka as the main opposition candidate in the 2020 presidential election. In September 2020, Maryia Kalesnikava was kidnapped in the centre of Minsk

by members of the secret services, who attempted to expel her from her native country against her will. However, she tore up her passport at the border. Later, a court sentenced her to 11 years in prison for allegedly endangering national security, extremist conspiracy, and attempting an unconstitutional seizure of state power.

Her health rapidly deteriorated in prison, and she underwent stomach surgery in late 2022. According to her sister Tatsiana Khomich, she is banned from seeing her family or lawyer, and even from reading newspapers or books.



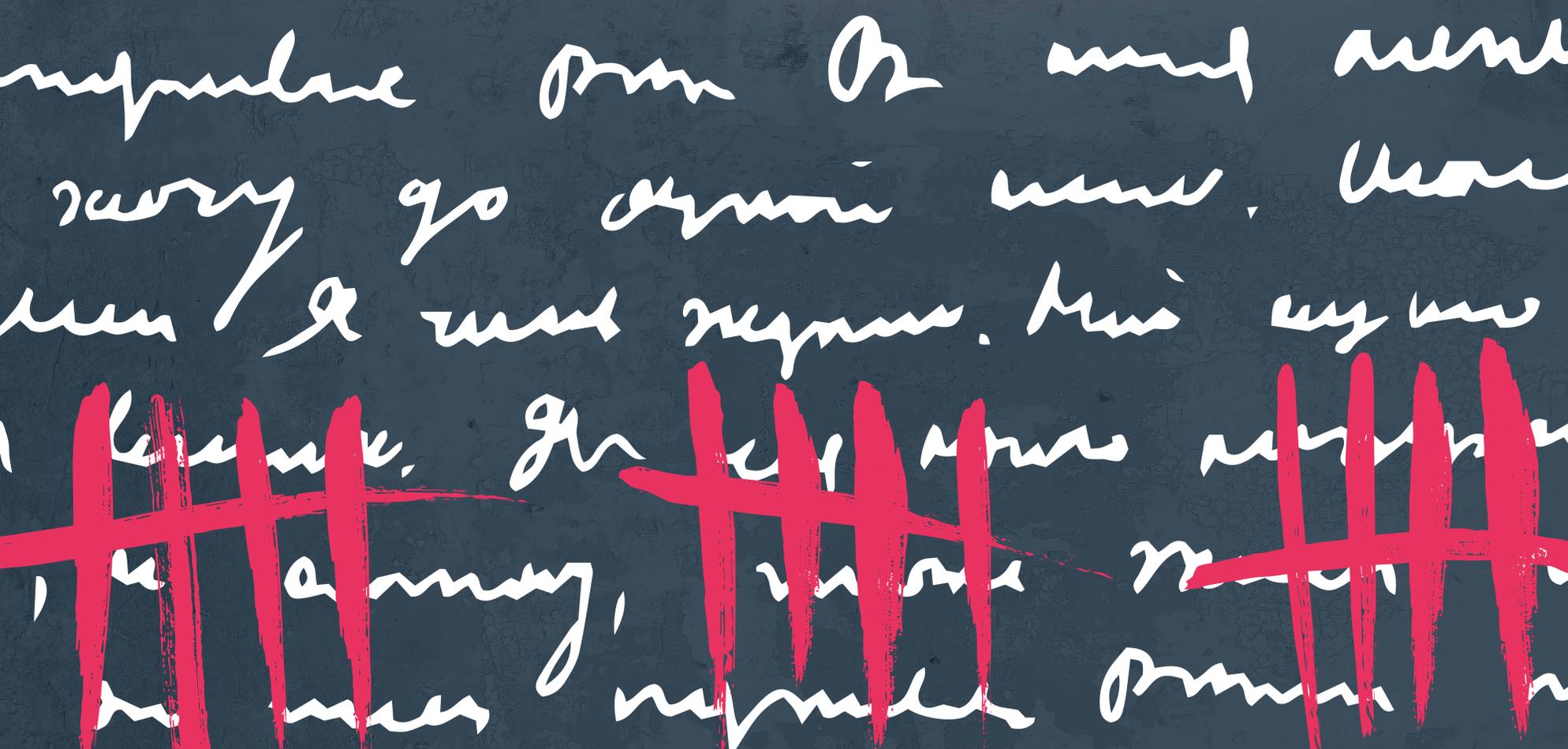
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VOLHA LOIKA (Belarus)

The editor-in-chief of the Belarusian exile media outlet Plan B., and formerly head of the political-economic editorial office of Belarus' largest news website Tut.by, spent 10 months behind bars. She and her colleagues were detained by Belarusian authorities in the spring of 2021 as part of a campaign against independent media covering the repression under Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime and protests against the rigged presidential election a year earlier.

Belarusian authorities first suspended Tut.by's media licence and later designated it as an extremist organisation. Volha Loika and several of her colleagues were then placed on a list of alleged terrorists. After her release from pre-trial detention, she emigrated from Belarus.



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ARSENY TURBIN (Russia)

Arseny Turbin, schoolboy and one of the youngest political prisoners in modern Russia. In June 2023, Turbin distributed anti-Putin leaflets, sourced from an online opposition platform, and left them in neighbourhood mailboxes in his hometown. On 5 September 2023, he was detained on his way to school. On 20 June 2024, a military court in Moscow convicted Turbin under Russia's anti-terrorism legislation for "participating in a terrorist organisation" and sentenced him to five years in a juvenile correctional colony.

While in detention, Turbin reportedly lost 17 kilograms, suffered physical assault, and spent time in solitary confinement – treatment his mother described as an attempt to "break his spirit". Despite his age and the nonviolent nature of his actions, Turbin's case became a stark example of how Russia's anti-terrorism laws are being used to silence dissent – even among teenagers.

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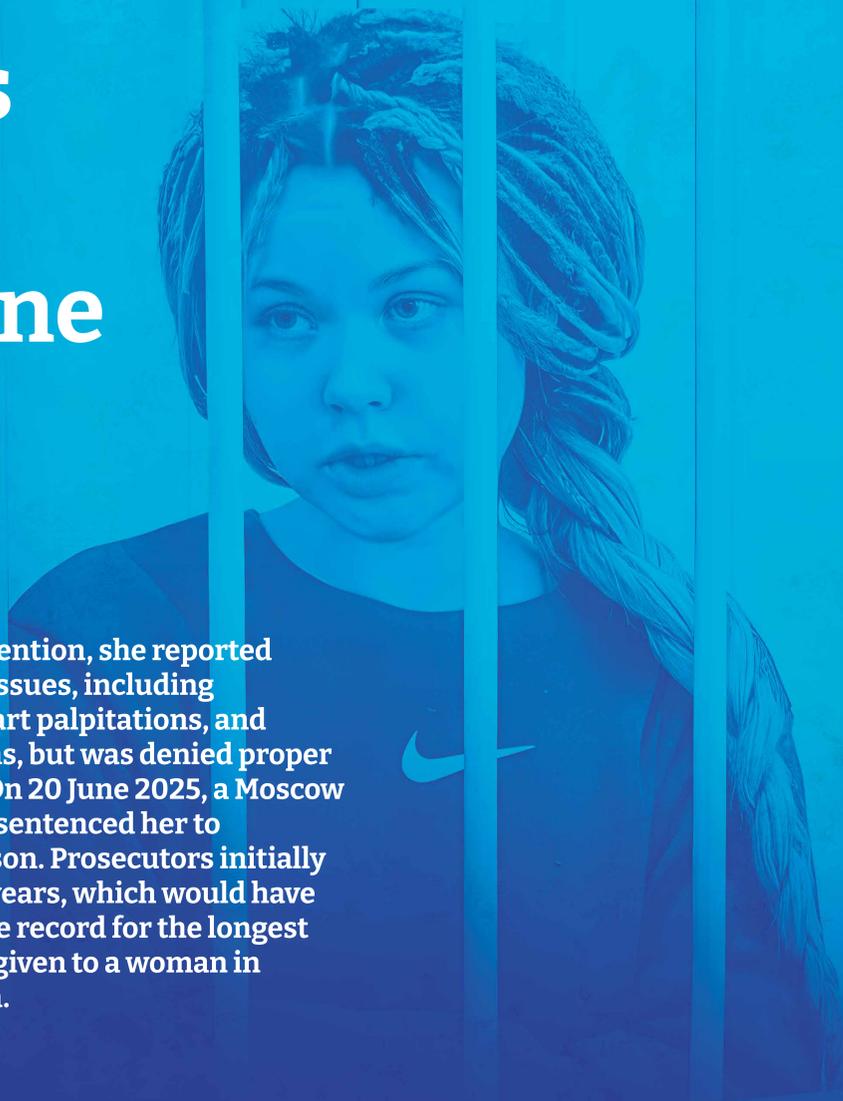
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NADEZHDA ROSSINSKAYA (Russia)

Nadezhda Rossinskaya, a Russian civic activist and founder of the volunteer group “Army of Beauties”. After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, her group helped evacuate thousands of Ukrainian refugees – women, children, and pets. In February 2024, Rossinskaya was arrested in Belgorod while returning from Georgia, where she had briefly relocated for safety. She was charged with treason and financing terrorism based on an Instagram post allegedly calling for donations to Ukraine’s Azov Battalion – a claim she denied.

During her detention, she reported severe health issues, including headaches, heart palpitations, and vision problems, but was denied proper medical care. On 20 June 2025, a Moscow military court sentenced her to 22 years in prison. Prosecutors initially demanded 27 years, which would have approached the record for the longest sentence ever given to a woman in modern Russia.



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