

Freedom of Religion and Belief in Belarus in Face of Political Crisis and Russian Invasion of Ukraine



About Christian Vision for Belarus

Founded in September 2020, **Christian Vision** coordinates informational, analytical, human rights, social, cultural, diplomatic, scholarly, and pastoral activities of the Belarusian Christian community. Its mission is to promote the protection of human rights, foster the rule of law, support democratic transformation, and facilitate national dialogue and reconciliation amid the deepening political crisis in Belarus and — since February 2022 — the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Freedom of Religion or Belief lies at the core of Christian Vision's work.

Faith-based, ecumenically oriented organisation uniting clergy, theologians, and activists of various religious communities in Belarus and abroad: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Anglican and Evangelical churches.

The organisation is officially registered in Lithuania and acts according to the European legislation. Despite this, in April 2025, Christian Vision was recognised by Belarusian KGB as an “extremist formation”.

In 2020, during the previous cycle of the UPR, the recommendation 138.153 was proposed by the Holy See: “Ensure that no restrictions are imposed on the right to freedom of religion and belief”. Since that time growing limitations of freedom of religion or belief and violations against believers, ministers and religious communities were observed.

Main Issues

Intimidation, detention, and threats against religious leaders and activists

Between 9.08.2020 and 23.08.2025, at least 90 religious ministers faced detentions, search of homes and places of worship, administrative arrests, administrative fines, criminal cases or imprisonment, experienced tortures and threats (**21 Orthodox, 38 Catholics, 30 Protestant**). 5 of them are currently recognised as political prisoners.

New restrictive legislation on freedom of conscience and religious organisations

New legislation on freedom of religion or belief adopted 30.12.2023 violates international standards and human rights obligations of Belarus. It demands **mandatory state registration** of a religious organisation as a pre-condition to operate and exercise their freedom of religion. All activities outside this framework are banned and criminalised. Re-registration is required.

Persecution on alleged extremist grounds against religious leaders, activists and communities

Media, websites, channels and social media accounts linked to Belarusian religious figures and communities are systematically labeled as extremist materials. Religious and faith-based organisations are recognised as extremist formations, which leads to persecution of them and their participants.

Between 9.08.2020 and 23.08.2025, at least 28 organisations and personalities got this status. **62 ministers and believers** were included in extremist list.

Violations of freedom of religion or belief of those in detention, custody and arrest

As of August 2025, there are **38** current Christian political prisoners, and **54** already served their term or were released after pre-trial detention. They are subject to violent and illegal confiscation of objects of worship; ban of religious literature and periodicals; denial of pastoral visits or attending churches.

Several political prisoners had to go on hunger-strike in order to receive a pastoral visit. **Siarhei Tsikhanouski** during his five year imprisonment was not allowed to have confession and communion even once.

Recommendations

- Ensure that no restrictions are imposed on the right to freedom of religion and belief.
- Amend the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations to remove the ban on the activity of religious organisations without registration. Additionally, repeal Articles 193-1 of the Criminal Code, as it contradicts the state's obligations to uphold human rights.
- Re-establish the legal personality of all religious organisations that had been registered under the 2002 Law but failed to re-register in accordance with the 2024 amendments to the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations.
- Stop persecutions on alleged extremist grounds against religious leaders, individuals and communities; revoke the designation of religious organisations and faith-based organisations as 'extremist formations' when assigned on political grounds.
- Ensure freedom of religion or belief for imprisoned persons persecuted on political grounds.
- To invite UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief for a country visit to Belarus

