



Latvijas Republikas tiesībsargs
Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia

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Regarding the situation on the Latvian-Belarusian border and statements made by Amnesty International

On 26 July 2022, Amnesty International issued public statements on the situation on the Latvian-Belarusian border. The organisation pointed out that while Latvia had accepted 34000 asylum seekers from Ukraine, people from Iraq and Afghanistan, including children, were left in the forest on the Latvian-Belarusian border for months during cold weather which, according to the organisation, indicates inhumane treatment and even torture. Amnesty International considers that an extension of the emergency situation at the border with Belarus should not be allowed, as it restricts access to international protection for persons in need, regardless of their origin and the way in which they enter the country.

In the opinion of the Ombudsman, “Amnesty International” statements, which lack factual evidence, do not accurately reflect the situation on the Latvian-Belarusian border in summer 2021 - winter 2022, incl. the actions of the State Border Guard of the Republic of Latvia during the emergency situation.

The Ombudsman would like to point out that a meeting took place in Riga on 9 March 2022 between the Ombudsman and the Director of Amnesty International Europe

Regional Office Mr Nils Muižnieks in which they discussed the situation on the Latvian-Belarusian border, including allegations of a lack of availability of the asylum procedure and an unlawful use of force by the border guards. A letter was also sent to Mr Muižnieks on 21 June 2022 (No 1-7/2) providing the requested additional information on the Ombudsman's position and conclusions based on the visit to the Latvian-Belarusian border that took place on 26 January 2022, as well as the activities of the Ombudsman in fulfilling the role of the national preventive mechanism, for example by visiting the accommodation centres for detained foreigners. At the meeting on 9 March and in the letter of 21 June, the Ombudsman stressed that, within the framework of his activities, no unlawful use of force by the State Border Guard of the Republic of Latvia has been detected. Similarly, no submissions or complaints have been received at the Ombudsman's Office regarding the unavailability of the asylum procedure or inadequate conditions in detention centres.

In the opinion of the Ombudsman, the biased statement published by Amnesty International on 26 July suggests that the information and assessment provided by the Ombudsman were not taken into account when assessing the situation on the Latvian-Belarusian border.

It is incomprehensible to the Ombudsman why Amnesty International would choose to ignore the information and conclusions of an independent national human rights institution. Such an approach – one that is not based on evidence - calls into question Amnesty International's competence, ability and willingness to critically analyse the situation by evaluating all the resources available to it. This approach also shows a lack of good will and collegiality in cooperation with other human rights organisations and institutions. Regrettably, the Ombudsman views the meeting on 9 March and the preparation of the letter of 21 June as an inefficient use of human resources and waste of time caused by Amnesty International.

The Ombudsman calls on Amnesty International to assess all the information available to it in the future, thus avoiding the publication of biased, incorrect and even defamatory statements.

Yours sincerely
Ombudsman

Juris Jansons