

## ACAT (Harrow group) – prayer case of the month (*October 2020*)

Please pray as you feel led for human rights defender **Marfa Rabkova**. She is the coordinator of the Volunteer Service of the Human Rights Centre “Viasna” in Belarus.



**Marfa Rabkova** and her husband, Vadzim Zharomski, were arrested on 17<sup>th</sup> September in Minsk by officers of the Interior Ministry’s Main Directorate for Combating Organised Crime and Corruption. Their apartment was searched, and money, personal belongings and IT equipment were seized. Vadzim Zharomski was later released, but **Marfa Rabkova** was remanded as a suspect under Art. 293(3) of the Criminal Code (“training or other preparation of persons to participate in riots, or funding of such activities”) which carries a prison sentence of up to three years. On 19<sup>th</sup> September, she was transferred to the pre-trial prison No. 1 in Minsk and on 25<sup>th</sup> September, she was officially charged.

Her detention comes in the context of a drastic deterioration in the human rights situation in Belarus. During the electoral campaign period and following the presidential election on 9<sup>th</sup> August, there have been mass peaceful protests including against the widely disputed official results. Throughout, the authorities have engaged in an escalating campaign against the opposition and all dissenting voices. Thousands of people have been arbitrarily arrested by police, an overwhelming majority of them peaceful protesters or bystanders, and many apprehended in abduction-style arrest by masked plain-clothed men.

According to Belarusian NGOs and Amnesty International, the authorities are persecuting her solely for her peaceful and legitimate human rights work such as observing demonstrations and documenting evidence of human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment of peaceful protesters detained by law enforcement officials: **Marfa Rabkova** has committed no crime and is herself at risk of torture.

Updates:

IRAN: Nasrin Sotoudeh (prayer case July 2019) is on hunger strike and seriously ill.