

## ACAT (Harrow group) – prayer case of the month (*June 2021*)

Please pray as you feel led for **Roman Protasevich** (26) who was detained with his girlfriend by the Belarusian government after the commercial flight in which he was travelling from Athens to Vilnius was intercepted on 23 May in Belarusian airspace by a Belarusian fighter jet and directed to land in Minsk.



**Roman Protasevich** is a Belarusian journalist, blogger, photographer and co-founder of the popular NEXTA Telegram channel, which became a key tool for information-sharing, mobilization and coordination of peaceful protests against widely-disputed presidential election results in August 2020. He left NEXTA in September 2020 and has been editing the Belamova Telegram channel since then.

Since 2019, **Roman Protasevich** has been living outside Belarus and based in Poland out of fear for his safety. On 5 November 2020, he was charged with "organization of mass disorder", "organization of group actions that severely violate public order" and "inciting hatred towards social groups" (these “groups” being police officers and government officials).

On 24 May, pro-government media issued a video depicting **Roman Protasevich** in a room with his face swollen and with what looks like a bruise on his forehead. In the video, he says that he is “cooperating with the investigators” and “giving confessions related to organization of mass disorders in the city of Minsk”. Such video “confessions” extracted under duress have been repeatedly used by the Belarusian authorities to intimidate and discredit their opponents.

If convicted, **Roman Protasevich** is facing up to 20 years' imprisonment. He is also at serious risk of further torture and other ill-treatment which have been widespread in Belarus against detained opponents of President Alexander Lukashenka. Since the August 2020 election, over 30,000 people have been arbitrarily detained and many have complained of torture and ill treatment.