

Lukashenko urges clergy to stay out of politics



Minsk, August 24, Interfax – Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has warned clergymen against meddling in domestic politics.

“I am surprised by the position of our religious denominations. My dear clergy, settle down and do your job. People are supposed to go churches to pray. Churches are not for politics,” Lukashenko said at a rally in Grodno on Saturday.

“Don’t be following the lead of renegades,” he said, noting that some clergymen will later “feel ashamed and disgraced” for the position they had taken.

“And the state will not look on indifferently,” Lukashenko said.

Belarus is gripped by the political crisis related to the August 9 presidential election, whose results were defied by the opposition, and the use of force by authorities against participants in mass protests. Protests and strikes are taking place across the country.

Since August 9 there have been reports about multiple instances of mistreatment and torture of people in police custody.

Over 600 people have complained about being injured during arrest and around 100 about sustaining injuries in detention facilities, the investigative committee said. Investigators also have received 124 complaints and reports about protestors' violent behavior toward law enforcement officers.

On August 20 the Investigative Committee said it was verifying claims on the Internet about raping of women held in custody. "Information has surfaced on various websites about women hospitalized in Grodno, who suffered sexual violence in temporary detention facilities, as reported by gynecologists on the condition of anonymity," the committee said on Telegram.

On August 15 the Belarusian Roman Catholic Archbishop of Minsk and Mogilyov, Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, appealed to Lukashenko and all those "vested with power at various levels" to stop violence and launch a constructive dialogue with the public.

On August 21 the Belarusian Orthodox Church expressed its hope for a proper inquiry into "egregious manifestations of cruelty" and called for the swift restoration of peace, unity and mutual understanding.

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