

Arrest and detention of journalists and demonstrators in Belarus: UK statement

World news story

Delivered by Helen Teasdale, First Secretary at the UK Delegation to the OSCE, at the virtual OSCE Permanent Council on 21 May 2020.



The United Kingdom is concerned about the recent arrest and detention in Belarus of over 100 people, including independent journalists, social media actors, human rights defenders and peaceful environmental demonstrators. The UK shares the concerns expressed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media that the detainees include journalists, who have been subject to imprisonment and administrative fines when they were reportedly merely observing and covering public gatherings.

As the co-host with Canada of last year's Global Conference for Media Freedom, which Belarus attended, the United Kingdom wishes to underline the importance of freedom of the media and freedom of expression more broadly as an essential quality of a functioning democracy. People must be allowed to debate issues freely, to question their governments and to make decisions, informed by a strong and robust media.

The United Kingdom is monitoring the situation closely and supports the Representative on Freedom of the Media's call for the release of all those detained journalists, social media actors and all peaceful demonstrators, who were exercising their right to freedom of expression. The United Kingdom urges Belarus to uphold their OSCE commitments, including those from the Copenhagen Meeting of 1990, reaffirmed in the 1999 Istanbul Summit Declaration, on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including to ensure freedom of the media as a basic condition for pluralistic and democratic societies.

We would welcome an update from the Delegation of Belarus on the number of detainees who have been released.

Published 21 May 2020