

Joint statement on the human rights situation in Belarus

Madam Chair,

I would like to deliver this statement on behalf of the following 37 countries: Albania , Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States, and my own country, Denmark.

In the face of massive, systematic and brutal violence following the 2020 presidential election in Belarus, 17 OSCE participating states invoked the OSCE Moscow Mechanism to look into serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus.

In his [report under the Moscow Mechanism](#), Rapporteur Professor Wolfgang Benedek concluded there was overwhelming evidence the Belarusian presidential election on 9 August 2020 was fraudulent, and the Belarusian security forces committed massive and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The report stated the period directly after the elections “has to be qualified as a period of systematic torture and ill-treatment” by the security forces against peaceful protesters.

Seven months after Professor Benedek’s evidence-based account, and more than nine months after the fraudulent presidential election, we note with great concern that the same systemic violations and abuses persist unabated. The number of political prisoners and detainees continues to rise, with members of the free media being particularly targeted.

According to human rights organizations, there are currently almost 400 political prisoners in Belarus. According to the General Prosecutor’s Office of Belarus, since August 2020, more than 3000 criminal cases have been initiated for violating the procedure for holding mass events and protests. In April 2021 alone, the courts passed sentences against at least 98 people in politically motivated criminal cases.

We note with particular worry that human rights organizations have reported numerous credible allegations of abhorrent treatment of prisoners, including torture. This seems to reflect a deliberate decision by the authorities to create a climate of fear, with the aim of silencing victims and witnesses.

Madam Chair,

Multiple times over the past months, we have called on Belarus to put an end to these violent acts, protect the victims and ensure the safety of all

individuals without discrimination. We have repeatedly called on Belarus to conduct prompt, effective and thorough investigations into all reports of human rights violations and abuses in order to ensure anyone responsible or complicit is held accountable.

We have invited Belarus, and we renew this invitation now, to keep this Council informed of the status of any investigations that may have been initiated.

In the face of these credible accusations, the various replies provided by Belarus to the Permanent Council over the past months have been unsatisfactory and not credible. Belarus has denied reports from multiple, independent and reliable sources such as international organizations, journalists and civil society and accused us of interfering in its internal affairs.

At the same time, pressure against civil society, human rights organizations, journalists and national minorities in Belarus continues unabated, and in some cases, has greatly increased. Representatives of these organizations face politically motivated detentions, interrogations and searches of their offices and homes. Journalists and other media actors are being prosecuted and sentenced merely for performing their work.

The authorities are continuing to repress those who have taken part in peaceful protests, increasingly using newly broadened legislation on countering extremism to detain and charge peaceful civil society representatives, journalists and other media actors, and human rights defenders. This, in effect, allows the authorities to criminalize any form of dissent, and we categorically and explicitly reject the supposition that such dissent amounts to "extremism".

These actions serve to silence civil society organizations and make it increasingly difficult for them to continue functioning in Belarus.

At the same time, new amendments of laws for ensuring national security broaden powers of law enforcement officers and de facto legalize future human rights abuses against civil society.

We continue to be deeply concerned that Belarus has not investigated any of the well-documented crimes by the authorities. To our knowledge, no criminal cases have been opened, no Belarusian officials have been held to account for their actions, and no Belarusian officials have condemned or even acknowledged the massive human rights violations and abuses following the elections.

The lack of action by the authorities exacerbates the climate of impunity in Belarus. These concerns justified a number of international initiatives aimed at examining serious human rights violations in Belarus, such as the OHCHR-led process established by the UN Human Rights Council and the International Accountability Platform for Belarus. We urge Belarus to cooperate fully with these initiatives.

Madame Chair,

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, which derive from the inherent dignity of the human person, have been at the heart of this organization since the Helsinki Final Act was signed more than 45 years ago. Respect for them is also an obligation under international law. It is high time for Belarus to adhere fully to the commitments and obligations it has freely made.

Against this background, and based on the recommendation of Professor Benedek's report, we once again repeat our questions to Belarus:

- when will the Belarusian authorities investigate the credible reports of massive human rights violations and abuses, including allegations of torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence, disappearance and killing by security forces?
- when will the Belarusian authorities bring criminal charges against those responsible for the human rights violations and abuses, including Belarusian security officials?
- when will the Belarusian authorities provide protection for the victims and witnesses who have bravely come forward and reported their accounts of human rights violations and abuses?

We look forward to engaging with Belarus in a genuine discussion on these and other concerns, as well as on how the OSCE and the wider international community can assist in addressing them. We urge Belarus to cooperate with the OSCE constructively and in good faith in order to resolve the present crisis in a peaceful and sustainable way.

Madame Chair, I would request that this statement be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you.