

OSCE Ministerial Council: joint statement on Belarus

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the following 37 participating States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Iceland, Malta, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, as well as my own country Finland.

For the past several months, we have witnessed serious and ongoing violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus since the fraudulent Presidential election of 9 August 2020. Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur Professor Wolfgang Benedek's report provided us with a large number of evidence-based accounts of peaceful protesters who were violently attacked and tortured by the authorities, simply for insisting on free and fair elections and a better, democratic future for their country.

According to credible reports, the number of arrests of peaceful protesters, journalists and human rights defenders is estimated at 30,000 since the Presidential election. The number of politically motivated criminal cases is reaching 900. The list of political prisoners continues to grow and contains more than 100 names. There is no indication that the authorities are investigating the thousands of well-documented reports of police brutality and torture filed since mid-August or the killings of protesters. We condemn the use of force against Belarusians exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As the report by the OSCE Rapporteur states, it appears that no professional or social group in Belarus has been spared by the Belarusian authorities' efforts to suppress peaceful dissent. Pressure on the medical, academic, and media communities has been especially harsh. Critics of the government and opposition figures have faced forced expulsion.

Respect for human rights and human dignity have been at the heart of this organization since the Helsinki Final Act was signed forty-five years ago. At this meeting, many Ministers have addressed the situation in Belarus, which is in clear violation of OSCE principles and commitments on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and democratic principles of government. The OSCE's comprehensive concept of security recognizes that respect for human rights within States is essential to lasting peace, prosperity and cooperation among States. Upholding respect for human rights in the OSCE area is the responsibility of all participating States. As reaffirmed at the 2010 Astana Summit, commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.

For the sake of the people of Belarus, we highlight as particularly

noteworthy the following recommendations from the Moscow Mechanism report. The report recommends that Belarusian authorities should:

- Cancel the results of the presidential elections of 9 August 2020 due to irregularities at all stages of the process
- Organize new genuine presidential elections based on international standards, inviting OSCE/ODIHR observation as well as other international and domestic observers
- Bring the electoral law into conformity with international standards as recommended by OSCE/ODIHR and the United Nations
- Immediately cease all violence, in particular torture and ill-treatment against peaceful protestors and opponents
- Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners held for political reasons
- Ensure that the standards of fair trial are respected
- Ensure the freedom of peaceful assembly in line with international standards
- Ensure the safety of all journalists and provide an enabling environment for the work of journalists and the media
- Refrain from interference with the access to the Internet, and terminate censorship and blocking of webpages
- Ensure that an independent and impartial body promptly investigates all allegations of torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence, disappearance and killing by security forces.

We urge Belarus to engage in dialogue within the OSCE and lend our full support to the current and incoming OSCE Chairs and their efforts to facilitate a national dialogue in Belarus. We stand ready to support and facilitate an inclusive national dialogue in order to resolve the present crisis in a sustainable way, safeguarding Belarus's sovereignty and independence, as well as its safe, democratic and prosperous future.

Mr. Chairperson, I would be grateful if you could attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.