

OSCE Ministerial Council side event on the Moscow Mechanism report: UK remarks

Good afternoon and welcome to this event on the ongoing situation in Belarus. I would like to thank my colleagues for agreeing to co-host this session and the other states who joined us in invoking the Moscow Mechanism in September. Your continued support for the people of Belarus is critical as they continue their campaign for justice and democracy, in the face of greater repression.

In recent weeks, we have all received the Moscow Mechanism report, compiled through the forensic work of independent expert, Professor Wolfgang Benedek. The UK is extremely grateful for his meticulous approach in exposing so many examples of the appalling human rights violations experienced by people from all walks of life in Belarus, whether students, journalists, political activists and opposition figures, demonstrators and, in some truly shocking cases, children. Equally, the flaws he has exposed in the election process that took place in the summer must be addressed and the UK has been clear that fresh elections can be the only practical way forward to address the political crisis in that country. We should also pay tribute to more than 700 Belarusian citizens who sent their accounts of the abuses they had witnessed and suffered to the rapporteur. We owe it to them to ensure that there is international action on its recommendations.

In today's panel discussion, we are bringing together experts on the situation in Belarus and representatives of Belarusian civil society who are living through this crisis. Their contributions will give us a sense of how the international community can most effectively respond to the recommendations in Professor Benedek's report – the ways in which we can promote their implementation by the Belarusian authorities, and how we might take forward further, more detailed investigations into the human rights violations which have taken place and expose those who are responsible. But also how we can support Belarusian civil society to continue to thrive in the face of repression, to enable the Belarusian people full access to the human rights they should be guaranteed. I am very grateful to all those speakers who have given up their time to join us; your voices must be heard and I am glad we have been able to provide this platform for you today.

We must all work together to ensure that those responsible for the litany of human rights violations recorded in Professor Benedek's thoroughly evidenced report are ultimately held accountable for their actions. The people of Belarus deserve the right not only to choose their government through elections that meet international standards, but also be able to live without fear of the kind of brutal repression we have seen take place. Thank you once again for joining us for this panel discussion on how we can continue to support the people of Belarus, to prevent impunity for their tormentors, and to ensure a future which they can determine, and in which their human rights are protected.

Thank you.