

Presidential elections in Belarus: UK statement

The UK continues to monitor the situation in Belarus as preparations for the upcoming Presidential election continue.

We note with disappointment, the lack of transparency around the system of candidate registration, resulting in popular opposition candidates being denied access to the ballot in spite of the fact that they had submitted well in excess of the required 100,000 ballot access signatures. To maintain confidence in the electoral process, it is important that all aspects of the election campaign are open, fair, and transparent.

We are concerned that there will be no ODIHR or Council of Europe missions to monitor this election due to the lack of a timely invitation from the Government of Belarus. The absence of these observation missions makes it all the more important that local independent observers are allowed unrestricted access to polling stations.

In our statements to the Permanent Council on 21 May and 02 July, we expressed our concerns over the targeting of peaceful protesters, members of the opposition, journalists, bloggers, and media actors by the Belarusian authorities. According to local NGOs, since the start of the election campaign, over 1,000 people have been arrested or detained for exercising their right to peacefully protest, or for reporting on these protests. Many people remain in arbitrary detention, and there have been reports, particularly by journalists and other media actors, of mistreatment by law enforcement officers. Once again, we urge the Belarusian authorities to release all those who remain in detention, and to allow people to enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

We are now less than three weeks away from the election, and it is important that candidates are given the opportunity to campaign without the fear of detention or persecution of themselves, their teams, or their supporters.