

Recent developments in Belarus: UK statement, 16 April 2021

Madam Chair,

It is with disappointment and concern that we learn of further restrictions on freedom of expression, of peaceful assembly, and freedom of the media in Belarus. There are worrying reports of amendments to a number of Belarusian laws, currently being considered in Parliament, which, if passed, will further restrict basic rights and fundamental freedoms that should be afforded to everyone. Like our EU colleagues, we also remain concerned at the treatment of the Polish community in Belarus.

According to reports by Belarusian NGO's, since last August's election more than 35,000 people have been detained, and more than 2,300 criminal charges have been brought against those who have called for greater democracy for Belarus. In his statement of 6 April, ODIHR's Director, Mr Matteo Mecacci, expressed his concern over the excessive use of force and unjustified and disproportionate penalties. We share his concerns and echo the call for all those arbitrarily detained to be released.

The UK remains steadfast in its solidarity with those working for a more democratic future for Belarus. Our support for the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, along with the recent UN Human Rights Council resolution, which mandated the UN's Office for the High Commission for Human Rights to launch their own investigative mechanism into human rights violations, will help ensure those responsible for human rights violations will be held to account.

Unfortunately, the Belarusian regime continues to exert pressure on those who oppose it, or call for greater freedom. It continues to ignore calls for dialogue with members of the opposition. Instead, by adding further names, including that of Presidential candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, to their list of supposed terrorists they are limiting the prospects of constructive engagement. We continue to support the offer of the current and previous OSCE Chairpersons-in-Office to facilitate a genuine national dialogue and urge the Belarusian authorities to take up this offer. Engaging in meaningful dialogue, which takes into account the views of the Belarusian people, is the only way to resolve the political crisis.

Once again, we remind the Belarusian authorities of the OSCE commitments which they have freely signed up to and urge them to take forward the 82 recommendations in [Professor Benedek's report](#), including new Presidential elections, an immediate end to the violence, the release of all those illegally detained, an independent oversight mechanism on detention conditions, and an investigation into all allegations of torture.

Thank you Madam Chair