

Recent developments in Belarus: UK statement, 16 July 2021

Madam Chairperson,

It is with regret that we must speak again about the further deterioration of the human rights situation in Belarus. Over the last two weeks, the Belarusian regime has launched another wave of crackdowns on independent media, human rights defenders and civil society organisations. Raids, searches and detentions have taken place in offices and homes across the country. On the morning of 14 July, searches were carried out against various human rights organisations including Viasna, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Constanta. Dozens of individuals have been detained.

We share the concerns of the Representative on Freedom of the Media in her [24th June statement](#) about amendments to the Belarusian laws on media, mass events and criminal liability. The changes to the laws will place excessive restrictions on media actors and shrink the space for freedom of expression.

The changes to the laws are detrimental to an already dire situation. The authorities' forced entry into a number of media offices, the detention of journalists with criminal charges brought against them, and the blocking of the Nasha Niva website – one of the very few remaining independent news outlets in Belarus – are simply unacceptable. We urge the Belarusian authorities to halt their persecution of independent media, unblock access to media websites and release all those held on political grounds.

Madam Chairperson,

The verdict and sentencing of Viktor Babaryka last week on what is widely believed to be trumped-up, politically motivated, charges is another example of the regime using any tool they can to silence critics and stifle any form of political opposition. The fact that independent media and diplomats continue to be blocked from observing trials, and lawyers are being stripped of their licences to stop them defending their clients, highlights the unjust and political nature of such proceedings.

We have further reports of poor conditions, torture and ill treatment in prisons and detention centres. Again, we call on the Belarusian authorities to launch proper, transparent and independent investigations into all reports of mistreatment and violations of human rights. And we call, again, for the release of all political detainees and journalists and those imprisoned for voicing opposition to the Lukashenko regime.

We are also concerned about the regime's facilitating of trafficking of vulnerable migrants across the border, a purposeful act intended to undermine the support offered by people in neighbouring countries who have shown solidarity for Belarusian democracy.

Madam Chairperson,

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. We also remind the Belarusian authorities, and this Permanent Council, that the recommendations of the independent report under the OSCE Moscow Mechanism, provide a clear roadmap to end the political and human rights crisis that engulfs Belarus.