

Belarus: Joint Statement by Media Freedom Coalition on the detention of journalists

News story

The Media Freedom Coalition's Executive Group have issued a statement on the Belarus elections.



The undersigned members of the Media Freedom Coalition's Executive Group express their concern about continued attacks on media freedom surrounding the August 9 presidential election in Belarus.

Media freedom is an important part of democratic societies and essential to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We are alarmed by credible reports that the Belarusian authorities have harassed, severely beaten, detained, and revoked the accreditation of journalists and other media workers covering the election campaign and ongoing protests. This crackdown is clearly intended to specifically target journalists and deny people in Belarus and abroad the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

We are also alarmed by the continued use of internet shutdowns which limit media freedom and hinder the ability of journalists and human rights defenders to report on human rights violations. Shutdowns impact all users—while disproportionately harming women, girls, and minority groups—and can violate human rights and fundamental freedoms. This includes freedoms of opinion and expression, and association, and peaceful assembly that form the basis of a democratic society. People need access to free media to provide them with accurate information and informed analysis to hold governments to account.

We call on Belarus to guarantee media freedom, refrain from internet shutdowns, and respect international human rights law. Journalists and other media workers in Belarus must be able to do their work without fear of

detention, reprisals or restrictions (online and offline) inconsistent with the right to freedom of expression. Journalists and other media workers unjustly detained must be immediately released. Those responsible for attacks on journalists and media workers must be held to account.

Canada, Germany, Ghana, Latvia, the Maldives, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America

Published 25 September 2020

[First phase of Dawlish seawall completed, securing South West's rail links](#)

- first phase of new seawall at Dawlish completed, protecting Isambard Kingdom Brunel's historic rail route in the South West
- milestone moment forms part of government's £80 million investment to improve resilience of railway following severe storms in 2014
- Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris visits new £25 million structure, preserving panoramic views for pedestrians and passengers, and an upgraded depot in Exeter

The completion of the first phase of a new seawall at Dawlish ensures an integral rail link for passengers and business across the South West is protected for "generations to come", Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris announced today (25 September 2020).

Visiting the site to officially open the new £25 million structure on the seafront west of Dawlish station, the minister saw the first phase of the £80 million scheme designed to create a more resilient railway at an exposed location, which was severely damaged in storms in 2014.

The new structure – which runs from Colonnade underpass, west of Dawlish station, to Boat Cove – will protect 360 metres of railway and homes behind it. Constructed after detailed consultation with the local community, the design is focused on preserving the panoramic views and access to the coast for residents and tourists, as well as ensuring passengers and businesses can rely on a secure, reliable service.

The Rail Minister also visited a train maintenance depot at Exeter, which has been expanded in partnership with Network Rail and train operator GWR to accommodate an increase in its fleet size in the Devon and Cornwall area.

The £53 million upgrade helps deliver more seats on more frequent services

for passengers, improving service reliability and capacity for passengers across the region.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said:

Our investment in this new seawall will provide a resilient railway for generations to come, delivering for the thousands of passengers that rely upon this vital link every day, and the residents whose homes and businesses must be protected.

This rigorous set of defences forms part of our ambitious plans to deliver reliable, punctual journeys across Devon and Cornwall, improving connections between communities to help the South West build back better, boosting the local economy and tourism.

Network Rail's plans for the second phase of the seawall, which extend it for a further 415 metres eastwards from Colonnades to Coastguards breakwater and include accessibility improvements to Dawlish station, have now been approved and work is expected to start next month, taking around 2 years to complete.

[Waste site director ordered to pay confiscation order](#)

Waste site operator, Barry Connally, has this week been ordered to pay back over £179,000 that he obtained through proceeds of crime while running an illegal waste operation.

Connally, 70, of Chaceley, Gloucester, was the sole director of Rhino Recycling Limited that operated a waste treatment facility on the QinetiQ Industrial Estate in Long Lane, Pershore. Between March 2013 and December 2015 he ran the site without the necessary Environmental Permit.

In June 2019, Connally was sentenced to 12 months' custody suspended for 18 months and also ordered to complete 160 hours' unpaid work in the community. The sentencing judge found that Connally prioritised profit and adopted an 'arrogant approach to the regulatory regime'.

The Environment Agency went on to bring confiscation proceedings against Connally to recover the proceeds of crime. In passing a confiscation order against him yesterday, Worcester Crown Court heard that he had used Rhino Recycling Limited's company persona to conceal his identity as the true actor in relation to the illegal waste operation.

Between March 2013 and December 2015, Connally acquired over £1,000,000 in criminal benefit from the company's illegal waste activities. He has been

ordered to pay back £179,373.36, the sum total of all of his available assets.

Connally also pleaded guilty to contempt of court for dealing with and disposing of a portion of his assets between September 2019 and July 2020, contrary to the terms of a court order forbidding him from doing so. He was sentenced to 4 months' imprisonment suspended for 18 months.

Speaking after yesterday's hearing a spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

This case shows that we're not just content to prosecute those who run illegal waste sites, we'll also come after them to get back the profits they made from their illegal activities and to recoup taxpayers' money spent on pursuing them.

[UK Government local coronavirus testing site opens in Edinburgh](#)

A new walk-through coronavirus testing centre has opened in Edinburgh. The new facility is being provided by the UK Government as part of a UK-wide drive to continue to improve the accessibility of coronavirus testing for local communities.

The centre, in the Usher Hall, will offer pre-booked tests for those with coronavirus symptoms.

The new site is situated so as to be easily accessible without a car. Those being tested will be required to follow public health measures, including social distancing, not travelling by taxi or public transport, practising good personal hygiene and wearing a face covering throughout, including while travelling to and from the testing centre.

Anyone attending an appointment at a walk-through testing will be provided with guidance on getting to and from the test site safely, with additional support for vulnerable groups and people with disabilities.

Testing at the new site will start today [Friday 25 September], from 2pm, with appointments made available every day.

The latest UK Government site is part of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history, which now comprises 75 drive-through sites, 112 walk-through sites, 258 mobile units, home testing and satellite kits and network of Lighthouse laboratories.

Testing is available only for those with coronavirus symptoms – a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, or a loss or change to sense of smell or taste. Anyone with one or more of these symptoms should book a test at [NHS Inform](#) or by calling 0800 028 2816. From the start of the pandemic, testing has been prioritised for the most vulnerable, including patients in clinical settings and care home residents, vital health and care staff and to manage outbreaks.

Anyone testing positive for the will be contacted by contact tracers to help them trace their contacts. This will help people to identify who they may have been in close contact with, protecting others from further transmission.

Close contacts of those testing positive will also hear from contact tracers, asking them to stay at home for 14 days to prevent them from unknowingly spreading the virus. They will be advised to also book at test if they develop symptoms.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

We continue to expand testing to make sure that everyone with symptoms can get a test, with our new walk-in sites making it even easier no matter where you live.

This new site forms part of our national testing network, which has the capacity to test more than a million people a week and is growing all the time.

If you have symptoms of coronavirus, I urge you to book a test today and follow the advice of contact tracers if you are contacted to protect others around you and stop the spread of the virus.

This is a national effort and we are proud to be working with a number of partners to turn this ambition into a reality and roll out additional capacity to where it is needed.

Baroness Dido Harding, Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection, said:

Our new walk through sites offer communities better access to coronavirus testing, so everyone with symptoms can get a test. This new site is part of our ongoing work to expand testing across the UK to deliver 500,000 tests a day by the end of October.

Please book a test if you have coronavirus symptoms: a new continuous cough, a high temperature and a loss or change in sense of smell or taste.

Everybody should continue to think hands, face, space, and follow the advice of contact tracers if you are contacted – this is the only way we can return to a more normal way of life.

UK Government minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart, said:

The UK Government is committed to helping all parts of the UK fight coronavirus. We are providing the bulk of covid testing in Scotland, and this new walk-through centre in Edinburgh comes on top of nine other testing sites across Scotland funded by the UK Government, as well as the Glasgow Lighthouse Lab.

Testing will play a vital part over the coming months, helping to manage local outbreaks and protect livelihoods. This walk-through centre will help people in Edinburgh have easy access to a test in the city centre.

We are pleased to be working with commercial partners and with Edinburgh's iconic Usher Hall. These sites are not possible without the hard work of many people and I would like to thank everyone involved for their incredible efforts.

The testing centre is being operated in partnership with Mitie and will self-administered tests.

Simon Venn, Chief Government & Strategy Officer, Mitie, said:

Our priority during the pandemic is to support the nation's efforts to fight COVID-19 and help keep the country running. Testing is a critical part of the UK's strategy to combat coronavirus and we're proud to support the UK Government with this vital task. A big thank you to all the NHS staff, Mitie employees and other frontline heroes in Edinburgh, who are working tirelessly to keep us all safe.

Treatment of government grant support schemes in business interruption insurance settlements: Letter from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury to the Association of British Insurers

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury has written to the Director General of the Association of British Insurers (ABI), Huw Evans, outlining HM Treasury's expectation that the value of government grant schemes intended to support

businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic should not be deducted from business interruption insurance settlements. This is in response to a letter from the ABI which gives a commitment from many of its members not to make such deductions, which can be found [on the ABI website](#).