

UN human rights expert calls unofficial visit to Belarus 'first step' towards cooperation

12 July 2017 – An independent United Nations human rights expert back from an unofficial visit to Belarus today said he was hopeful for a dialogue to begin with the country's Government.

Miklós Haraszti said that although the Government still did not recognize his mandate, it was encouraging that they had allowed him to attend a human rights seminar, which took place on July 6, alongside the parliamentary assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

"I see the authorities' tolerance as [a sign of progress](#) which may be the first step toward cooperation with the mandate created by the Human Rights Council in 2012," Mr. Haraszti said.

He also noted the publication of the Government's action plan on human rights, even though none of the 100 points within the plan tackle civic or political rights.

Mr. Haraszti, who was in the country for a special event, and not at the invitation of the Government to pursue work related to his UN mandate, said the Government could quickly change the human rights situation, if it wished.

"The absolute command that the Government has established over public life also allows it to bring change at a stroke of a pen," he told the seminar on human rights.

The seminar highlighted two key areas of concern regarding human rights in Belarus, according to the expert.

"The first is a systemic refusal of individual liberties – a permission-based regime of public life, which in effect criminalizes all Belarusians who act without prior authorization," he said. "We also note a lack of independence of the judiciary, and ongoing use of the death penalty.

"The second area of concern is the cyclical recourse to mass repression, such as the crackdowns in December 2010 and March 2017, when the authorities actually criminalize citizens for using their civic and political rights."

Mr. Haraszti spoke out against Government actions earlier this year, expressing dismay at what he called "the Government's return to the policy of violent mass repression."

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