

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 54th SESSION

Interactive dialogue on the interim oral update of the High Commissioner on the situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath

25 September 2023

In her opening remarks, **Ms. Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**, highlighted there has been no improvement in Belarus three years after the contested Presidential elections in August 2020. She noted a worsening of civic space, a lack of respect for fundamental freedoms, and a campaign of violence and repression against government critics and those with independent views. Arbitrary arrests and prosecutions continue, resulting in over 3,750 convictions with little regard for due process. Ms. Al-Nashif raised alarm about torture, ill-treatment, and deaths in detention centres, as well as restrictions on legal assistance. The government's control over civic space has tightened, with nearly 3,300 individuals labelled as "extremists." Journalists face arrests, and numerous NGOs are being dissolved. She also expressed concern about new restrictions on political parties, as did legislative proposals threatening communities and individuals. The expansion of the death penalty for ill-defined crimes is alarming as well as the amendments to the Citizenship Law. Ms. Al-Nashif called for the government's cooperation and urged immediate actions to release detainees, end human rights violations, and conduct transparent investigations. She also encouraged support for accountability through national proceedings.

Belarus (Country concerned) opposed the report, considering it based on unreliable sources and biased assessments. The country expressed that Western countries continue to promote their own interpretations of the 2020 presidential elections in Belarus, disregarding the legitimate choice of the Belarusian people. Belarus expressed that the allegations about civil society repression do not correspond to reality. The country considers that Western countries have intentionally created a distorted image of civil society in Belarus. The Belarusian people continue to respond with a high level of support for the state's policies. The country expressed that the elections of 2020 exposed the interest of several Western countries in bringing pro-Western "elites" to power in Belarus. Belarus will continue to oppose the sanctions against the country and this resolution and will continue to uphold the Belarusians' right to an independent development path and adherence to real, not imposed, human rights priorities.

Interactive dialogue

Most states and state organizations such as **Estonia, the EU, the United States, the United Kingdom, Albania, and Montenegro**, strongly condemned the systematic and widespread violations of international human rights law in Belarus, particularly the unlawful deprivation of life and numerous cases of arbitrary deprivation of liberty, torture and other ill-treatment, as well as sexual and gender-based violence. Several countries denounced the violations committed by Belarusian authorities against civil society actors, human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, anti-war protesters, and opponents of the Belarusian authorities. Some countries reiterated their call for a moratorium on all executions with the aim of eventually abolishing the death penalty. Additionally, several countries condemned Belarusian authorities' involvement in the violations of international law related to Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. They also expressed concern about Russia's unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children to Belarus and called upon Belarus to immediately ensure their safe return. Furthermore, several countries expressed concern about the recent steps taken by Belarusian authorities to stop issuing passports to Belarusians abroad. Some countries called upon Belarusian

authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all arbitrarily detained persons and urged the international community to ensure accountability for violations of international human rights law and to continue the fight against impunity.

The **EU** condemned the recent designation of Viasna Human Rights Centre as an “extremist formation” by Belarus reflecting the authorities’ wider assault on the Belarusian civil society, media, journalists, persons belonging to national minorities, trade unions, and the broader human rights community. **Ukraine** harshly condemned Belarusian authorities’ complicity in the human rights violations by Russia against Ukraine, including the abduction of Ukrainian children. **Costa Rica** denounced political repression and was alarmed about the presidential decree to revoke passports. **Switzerland** was deeply concerned about the violations of freedom of expression under the pretext of combating extremism and terrorism.

Azerbaijan, Lebanon, and Sudan highlighted the importance of respecting the principles of the Charter, including non-selectivity, objectivity, and non-interference in internal affairs. They emphasized the importance of having the consent of the country for the mandate and the need to promote genuine dialogue and cooperation.

Cambodia, the DPRK, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Zimbabwe commended Belarus for meeting its human rights obligations, including through the UPR. The **DPRK, Eritrea, Nicaragua, the Syrian Arab Republic, Iran, Venezuela, the Russian Federation, Zimbabwe, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cuba, and China** opposed the persistence of double standards and mandates without the consent of the country. They expressed respect for the human rights path chosen by the Belarusian people, condemned efforts to destabilize Belarus’s society, and opposed any mandate that sought to intervene in its sovereignty. They also denounced the unilateral coercive measures against this country and called upon countries to cease implementing them. They argued that this mandate goes against the principles of the Charter, including non-selectivity, objectivity, and non-interference in international affairs. **China** urged cooperation and dialogue. **Venezuela** expressed that Western countries want to politicize the work of the HRC.

All NGOs were deeply concerned about Belarusian authorities’ crackdown on civil society, including violations against journalists, peaceful activists, and human rights defenders. They urged the international community to guarantee accountability. Several NGOs denounced the harsh repression by Belarus against independent media and civil society activists, including journalists and human rights defenders. They also condemned cases of torture of political prisoners, inhumane treatment in detention, and violations against freedom of expression and association. One NGO urged the UN to establish an independent tribunal for Belarus to address political repression violations. Some NGOs denounced the law passed by Belarus to stop issuing passports to Belarusians abroad and urged the international community to assist Belarusians stranded in other countries. One NGO highlighted the plight of Belarusian asylum seekers in Lithuania because of attacks by Belarusian authorities on NGOs and activists. Finally, another NGO condemned the retaliation against lawyers for representing the opposition and peaceful protesters, forcing them to flee the country.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (40 country delegations):

Belarus, Estonia (On behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries), European Union, Belgium (on behalf of BENELUX), Lichtenstein, Czechia, Austria, Costa Rica, Croatia, the United States of America, Lithuania, Germany, Switzerland, Malta, France, Poland, China, Zimbabwe, Romania, Russian Federation, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Cuba, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Lao People's Democratic Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, Montenegro, Ukraine, Greece, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Syrian Arab Republic, Republic of Moldova, Lebanon, Sudan, Nicaragua, Eritrea, Cambodia, Azerbaijan.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (8):

Human Rights House Foundation, International Federation for Human Rights Leagues, Institute for Human Rights, Amnesty International, Institute for Reporter's Freedom and Safety, Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI), International Bar Association, Right Livelihood Award Foundation.

To watch the full meeting refer to UN Web TV, [part 1](#) and [part 2](#).