

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 56th SESSION

### Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus

03 July 2024

**Ms. Anaïs Martin, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus**, addressed the Council, for the last time in her mandate, with the outcomes of her report. The report focused on the freedom of association. She observed a further tightening of the screws against any real or perceived opposition to the acting government, and the systematic persecution of anyone who express dissenting views about its policies.

She shared concerns about three of the most worrying recent trends. *Firstly*, she mentioned multiple reports of cruel and ill-treatment in detention, especially of persons detained for political motives. According to human rights defenders, there are now 1409 political prisoners in Belarus. Those behind bars suffer from discrimination, restrictions on communication with their families and lawyers, disciplinary sanctions, solitary confinement, and incommunicado detentions – in some cases for such long periods that it could amount to enforced disappearances. Denial of adequate and timely medical care is reportedly systematic and deliberate against political prisoners. *Secondly*, she reported that dissidents compelled to exile continue to face harassment, being labelled as traitors or extremists, and prosecuted in absentia for alleged crimes in what appears to me rather as revenge on the part of the government. These exiles have no fair trial guarantees. *Thirdly*, she lamented the continuous impunity for past human rights violations.

Concerning the **freedom of association**, she affirmed that the Government of Belarus embarked on a systematic purge of all the associations. The Government targeted human rights defense groups, NGOs, and online communities including Telegram chats, cultural associations, independent trade unions bar associations, and religious associations.

In all these cases, drastic measures were taken to suppress independent associations from the public space, at the workplace, in digital space, and even in the private sphere. The authorities ordered re-registration campaigns, restricted access to funding, and retaliated against anyone making donations to independent organizations.

In conclusion, she stressed that repression in Belarus has reached such a scale and intensity that it should not be considered a safe country for anyone who ever showed disagreement with the government or its policies. She reiterated her call to refrain from extraditions and expulsions to Belarus and called on the authorities to review their position and establish an effective working relationship with the new Special Rapporteur.

**Belarus (concerned country) did not make any comments.**

### Interactive dialogue

**23 took the floor during the interactive dialogue**, most of which reiterated their concern about the ongoing and increased human rights violations in Belarus. Also, they stressed their concerns in relation to the authorities' use of premeditated and targeted violence and harassment of dissidents and their families at home and abroad. **Lithuania, and the Nordic-Baltic Countries**, affirmed that some of the violations committed in Belarus may amount to crimes against humanity. More international attention to this issue and increased pressure on the Belarusian side is necessary. **Ukraine** reiterated that the human rights situation in Belarus has not just deteriorated, it has reached a critical and alarming state.

The reports of torture, inhumane and degrading treatment, and deaths in custody are a blatant assault on human dignity that demands immediate and decisive action.

Countries such as **Switzerland, Albania, and Romania** were worried about this, just as it is worried about the prevalent impunity and the measures put in place to consolidate the control of the Belarusian authorities over civil society. **France** rejected the pressure exerted by the system on Belarusian citizens abroad, halting the issuing of passports by Belarusian consulates and trials in absentia. These new practices are an attack on political opponents, and they try to create an environment of fear going beyond the borders of Belarus.

The majority of the countries, including the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Switzerland, the EU, the United States of America, and Czechia**, called on Belarus to guarantee freedom of association, as well as to create a safe and free environment in which civil society and independent media can operate free from harassment and repression. They urged Belarus to release and rehabilitate all political prisoners. Countries raised questions concerning the future of the SR's mandate, taking into account the lack of cooperation with Belarus. Additionally, they asked the state of the Belarusian society. A significant portion of the population is facing post-traumatic disorder syndrome and troubles, including depression, but yet they are resilient and in spite of the permanent propaganda of efforts at policing society, militarizing the minds of the people, indoctrinating youth and children.

**NGOs**, remaining gravely concerned about the continued attacks on freedom of association in Belarus, reported ongoing cases of attacks on the Belarusian population, who has been forced into exile. Repression against Belarusian civic groups continues, including arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment of activists, protesters, journalists, human rights defenders, and lawyers. They urged Belarus to protect the right to freedom from torture and arbitrary deprivation of liberty for women human rights defenders and to provide adequate legislation and specialized services for victims of domestic violence. Belarusian women's voices have persistently been silenced by the Belarusian authorities. Similar repression extends to individuals belonging to LGBTIQ+ communities. These systemic human rights violations profoundly undermine the well-being of the entire society, added **the Centre for Global Nonkilling**.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (23 country delegations):

*Lithuania (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic States), EU, Poland, Liechtenstein, Czechia, Canada, France, Slovenia, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain, USA, Cyprus, Albania, Bulgaria, Austria, UK, Switzerland, Romania, Moldova, Slovakia, Ukraine, Armenia.*

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (10):

Human Rights House Foundation, World Resistance International, Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI), International Bar Association, Advocates for Human Rights, Centre for Global Nonkilling, CIVICUS, International Commission of Jurists, FIDH, Human Rights Watch.

To watch the full meeting refer to the [UN WEB TV](#).