



GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus

#HRC59 • 26 June 2025



PRESENTATION OF THE ORAL UPDATE

Mr. Nils MUIŽNIEKS, Special Rapporteur (SR) on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus

The SR presents his first report before the UNHRC shedding light on the situation of human rights in Belarus, in particular by drawing the Council's attention in and around the **presidential elections** held in late January 2025. Over the reporting period, the overall human rights situation continued to deteriorate, with new forms of repression added to old.

The most worrying trend which has continued is **political persecution** of people for the legitimate and peaceful exercise of their civil and political rights. Ever since the 2020 elections and the ensuing mass protests against election fraud, the authorities have regularly targeted critics and any real perceived or potential opposition to the government through both criminal and administrative proceedings and unfair trials. The authorities have done this by **abusing highly problematic counterterrorism and anti-extremism legislation** as well as other legislation such as that prohibiting insulting the President or other public officials.



As a result, Belarus has a very **large number of people behind bars** who should not be there, including opposition politicians, human rights defenders, journalists, independent trade union activists, environmental defenders, and lawyers. Human rights defenders call them political prisoners, and at the end of the reporting period counted about 1,200 such prisoners in the country. If these figures are even close to being accurate, Belarus probably has **the most political prisoners per capita in the world**.

A new development since July 2024 has been several **waves of presidential pardons** affecting over 200 persons. The latest pardon affected 14 people, including Sergei Tikhanovsky, the former presidential candidate and husband of exiled leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. But the overall number of people unjustly imprisoned has remained more or less steady as repression has continued and people continue to be placed in detention. The pardons have sometimes been accompanied by new human rights violations, including **forcing persons to make propaganda videos** expressing remorse or forcing people to sign cooperation agreements with the Committee of State Security as a condition for their release.

Those who remain in detention face terrible conditions and often brutal treatment, which sometimes has lethal consequences. **Deaths in custody** or soon after release continue to take place during the reporting period. The report mentions two such cases, but the SR recently addressed the authorities regarding other cases as well. The SR has received many reports, including firsthand testimony about inhuman conditions of detention and intentional ill-treatment of prisoners. Women are the targets of **gender-specific ill-treatment**, including strip searches by male staff, even during menstrual periods, denial of hygiene products, lack of proper gynaecological care, and restrictions on communication between mothers and children.

The SR must stress a particular form of ill-treatment, **incommunicado detention**, which affects many prisoners convicted in relation to the protests of 2020. At least eight have been held incommunicado for over one year, and several for over two years. Another group of persons held incommunicado are those who have been transferred for compulsory psychiatric treatment as a result of their criminal prosecution on politically motivated charges. During the reporting period, the SR received credible information about 33 persons affected by this practise, which recalls Soviet abuses of psychiatry for political persecution.

Another form of ill-treatment is **arbitrary extensions of prison terms** for alleged malicious disobedience to penitentiary authorities. Imagine how it must feel. You've almost served your full prison sentence, which was unjustly imposed on you for exercising your human rights. You've suffered awful conditions and ill-treatment. You're about to be released when the authorities inform you that your sentence has been extended by another year. A number of prisoners have had their sentences arbitrarily extended not once, not twice, but even three times. In this connection, the SR mentions the case of Viktoryia Kulsha, an activist who has had her sentence extended three times and is being investigated under the same provision for the fourth.

The predecessor of the current SR noted in one of her reports that **elections have been catalysts for human rights violations** in Belarus. This has held true during my mandate as well, although the SR's mandate is only seven months long as of now. The closer the elections come, the greater the repression. As a presidential election approached in Belarus, persecution intensified,



persecution of family members, of those recognised as political prisoners, of people who sought to assist those prisoners by sending letters, transferring money or aid packages. As the elections approached, the authorities increasingly resorted to new forms of transnational repression as well - **trials in absentia** against Belarusian citizens living abroad, especially of exiled politicians, human rights defenders, journalists and activists. The authorities not only go after people who have fled abroad, they are increasingly **confiscating their property** in Belarus as well.

The SR has sincerely tried to cooperate with the Belarusian authorities, but they have ignored his request for a visit or for meetings here in Geneva. The SR has tried to communicate with them by addressing many communications to them, but their responses are almost always formalistic and uninformative, recalling their legislation, but providing no information on individual cases. Since assuming his mandate, the SR has systematically tried to **engage other mandate holders** in his communications with the Belarusian authorities, so as to pre-empt accusations of bias and selectivity. Thus letters or statements the SR initiated on Belarus have been co-signed by members of three different Working Groups, one Independent Expert and ten other Special Rapporteurs. Many of his colleagues have joined in signing such communications repeatedly.

In closing, the human rights situation in Belarus remains dire, with no signs of progress or improvement since the end of the reporting period. The SR is already gathering information for his report to the UNGA, which will encompass much of the ground covered in this report to the UNHRC, but he will also look at **human rights in labour and employment** in Belarus, including the use of forced labour, professional restrictions, trade union rights, and the rights of migrant labourers.

REPLIES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

On how to **support Belarusians in exile**, the SR stresses most and foremost the principle of non-refoulement. States must not send them back to Belarus, especially if they are at risk of ill-treatment, and shall not cooperate with the Belarusian authorities in abuse of Interpol red notices, sending people back and exposing them to persecution. The SR further stresses that funding for the exile community is quite tight now, especially after the United States administration cut its funding, notably for media and for youth groups. To help Belarusian exile community, the focus could be placed on media and youth activists in order to give a clear signal to the Belarusian authorities that transnational repression is not acceptable and will not be tolerated in the jurisdiction of other countries. This an interstate issue that does not affect just Belarus' relations with the persons in question, but with the state in question. The SR also recommends giving political support to the Belarusian exile community, for instance by supporting prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, and inviting exile communities spokespeople to speak at events, providing them with a platform to raise their concerns and share information.

The **situation of human rights defenders** is quite dire, as there are very few left in the country. They are keeping a very low profile. There are still some working, trying to stay out of the sights of the authorities. States can support people in Belarus by supporting exile media. They need this information about what is going on in their country, what is going on in the world. The pressure must be kept up to raise the cost of continuing repression. The situation of human rights must be



kept high on the agenda at the UN, in other regional organisations such as the OSCE, the European Union, the Council of Europe and elsewhere. The SR believes we have to give a clear signal that **releases of people are not enough**. The ongoing repression must stop as well as future arbitrary deprivation of liberty, which requires amending laws, in particular the laws on counterterrorism, defamation, and extremism. It further requires changing policies, for instance, giving access to lawyers, stopping incommunicado detention, etc. It also requires strong political signals from the leadership of Belarus that any ill-treatment will be punished, any profiting or facilitation of irregular migration will be punished. So far, we have seen none of those signals, but this is what is needed to move forward.

Turning to **conditions of detention and independent monitoring**, the SR believes it is absolutely critical is access of lawyers to people in detention. This is one preventive measure to stop ill-treatment, but lawyers are not able to carry out their profession in a dignified way. The SR on Belarus jointly with the SR on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers a **day devoted to endangered lawyers in Belarus** this year. Informing bar associations across the world about the situation of lawyers is absolutely critical so that they can engage with their governments in a very informed way.

If governments could use their **diplomatic leverage to urge the ratification of OPCAT** and the creation of a national preventive mechanism (NPM), that would be a step forward. Accountability begins at home. Before hoping to have comprehensive accountability internationally, there should be some accountability at home within Belarus. We need political signals, we need punishment, and we need changes in laws and policies. While waiting for that to happen, there are a number of different measures that individuals can take. They can resort to **universal jurisdiction** to go after the violators. In this connection, the SR mentions Lithuania's referral of Belarus to the ICC. Countries can support this referral. The focus of the Group of Independent Experts (GIE) on Belarus is also on mechanisms for accountability, and the SR looks forward to their concrete recommendations in that regard.

Turning to the **impact of the death penalty**, there is no evidence that the death penalty anywhere deters crime, but it is a signal, particularly in Europe, that the country in question defies human rights and defies regional standards. All other countries in the region have banned the death penalty. It is particularly dire in Belarus because there are no fair trials, so anybody subject to the death penalty will not have a fair chance to appeal and to challenge it in an impartial court.

Concerning the most effective way to **free political prisoners**, the SR says most and foremost we have to stop new political prisoners from being created. Otherwise, it amounts to creating a hostage situation that will go on for a long period of time. First, we have to prevent the creation of new political prisoners by changing laws, policies, and rhetoric, because even if there are releases, that will not stop the issue from reproducing itself. The pressure on and engagement with the authorities must be maintained. In closing, the SR mentions **Ales Bialiatski, Nobel Prize laureate**, and other human rights defenders who deserve the Council's continued attention, support, solidarity – they should be released immediately. Countries shall participate vocally in the UPR on Belarus to hold the authorities accountable for the non-implemented recommendations that they have supported.



INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

Concerned Country

The delegation of **Belarus** is not present in the room.

Views Expressed by State Delegations

Albania voices alarm at the deteriorating situation in Belarus. The cycle of fear, censorship, arbitrary detention and violence targeting dissident voices has only intensified in recent times. Belarus continues to set a grim record for the European continent with, as of this date, 1,200 political prisoners who are subject to discriminatory treatment, to restrictions on their rights and to ill-treatment. Albania calls upon the authorities of Belarus to immediately release unconditionally all arbitrarily detained persons, and condemns the generalised and widespread recourse to torture and ill-treatment in places of deprivation of liberty, including that targeting women, minors and the elderly. Belarus continues to voluntarily refuse to cooperate with the United Nations mechanisms, which Albania regrets. Thus, it urges Belarus to resume unhindered cooperation with United Nations mechanisms. Faced with an unparalleled reduction in civic space in the country, Albania can only pay tribute to those civil society organisations who continue nonetheless to work on human rights issues in Belarus. Finally, Albania calls upon member states of this body to work jointly to ensure that the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people of Belarus are protected and upheld.

Australia deplores the Belarusian government's continued denial of civil and political rights, and supports the democratic aspirations of Belarusians for a free, democratic and independent Belarus. No election can be considered free, fair or in line with international standards when it is held in a climate of ongoing repression, marked by arbitrary detentions, restrictions on genuine political participation and a clampdown on civil society. Australia remains deeply concerned by reports of ongoing abuse and ill-treatment of people arbitrarily detained for exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of opinion, expression and of association. Hence, it calls for their immediate release. Australia commends the courageous advocacy of civil society organisations, human rights defenders and others who continue to carry out essential human rights work in challenging circumstances. Australia also reiterates its condemnation of the Belarusian government's complicity in Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and calls on Belarus to immediately cease its support for Russia's illegal invasion.

Austria reiterates its call for Belarus to respect, protect and fulfil human rights in compliance with its obligations under international human rights law and to cooperate with the SR on all relevant human rights mechanisms and investigations. Austria acknowledges the reports regarding recent release of some political prisoners, while emphasizing that more than 1,200 political prisoners in Belarus still remain detained in appalling conditions, some held incommunicado for years. Austria urges Belarus to immediately and unconditionally release and rehabilitate all those unlawfully or arbitrarily detained, including human rights defenders, trade unionists, journalists, media workers and lawyers. Austria is particularly concerned at the growing trend of transnational repression through trials held *in absentia*, collective punishment of families, indefinite extensions of the probation of liberty for those convicted on politically



motivated charges and the misuse of anti-terrorism or anti-extremism legislation for political repression.

Bulgaria remains deeply concerned that the human rights situation in Belarus has further deteriorated with ongoing widespread repressive measures and continuing violations of the freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly. Bulgaria is worried about the ongoing torture and ill-treatment in places of detention, including denied access to medical care, to legal advice, to communication with families, deprivation of food, abusive use of disciplinary measures. Bulgaria calls for effective investigations into all human rights violations. Seeing the release of 14 political prisoners, including Sergei Tikhanovsky, on 21 June as a positive step, Bulgaria reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and those arbitrarily detained on politically motivated grounds. Bulgaria regrets that the elections in Belarus, including the presidential elections in January 25, were held under ongoing politically motivated repression in violation of the legally recognised right to vote and be elected in genuine, fair, periodic elections. Reiterating its strong condemnation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which is being supported by Belarus, Bulgaria calls on Belarus to comply with its international obligations. In view of the scale and severity of the human rights violations in Belarus, the UNHRC should continue monitoring the human rights situation in the country.

Croatia deplore the report's finding of all the ill treatment of persons in detention, repression of human rights defenders, lack of basic trial guarantees and a complete crackdown on freedom of expression, assembly and association. Croatia joins the SR's call to the authorities to launch prompt, effective, impartial and transparent investigation of all allegations of ill treatment and deaths in penitentiary institutions. The reports of intimidation and persecution of family members of political prisoners and transnational repression of persons in exile are equally concerning. Slightly encouraged by the release of over 200 political prisoners, including the opposition leader, Sergei Tikhanovsky, Croatia urges the Belarusian authorities to release the remaining high number of individuals identified as political prisoners, especially the ones with disabilities and health conditions.

Cyprus shares the SR's concern at the continuing repression of individuals both within and outside of Belarus, as well as stifling of independent, critical and democratic voices. The situation in the country continues to be marked by a severe and systematic crackdown on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the suppression of dissent, political persecution and the erosion of civil society. Detention, intimidation, ill-treatment, torture and harassment of individuals, coupled with a lack of accountability and impunity for the perpetrators, have unfortunately become commonplace. Cyprus urges the Belarusian authorities to immediately end the persecution of individuals for exercising their civil and political rights, to allow them access to legal counsel and to release those convicted on politically motivated charges. It also calls on Belarus to ensure prompt, independent, impartial and transparent investigations, ensuring appropriate remedies in cases of violations and holding those responsible to account. The recent release of dissidents, although a welcome outcome, does not go far enough.

Czechia remains gravely concerned at continued and systemic repression in Belarus and alarmed by the widespread use of *in absentia* trials, indefinite prison extensions, and the incommunicado detention of political prisoners, including Ales Bialiatski. The use of forced



psychiatric confinement and collective punishment of families are deeply troubling. Czechia urges Belarus to release and rehabilitate all political prisoners, including journalists such as Ihar Iliyash and Katsyaryna Andreeva, and to end arbitrary arrests, inhuman detention conditions, and the misuse of anti-extremist laws to silence dissent. Targeting of independent journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders, and LGBTQI plus persons must stop. Belarus must fully comply with its international human rights obligations and ensure that all detainees are treated with dignity, have access to legal counsel and medical care, and are protected from torture and ill-treatment.

Germany continues to be deeply concerned at the human rights situation in Belarus, and condemns the ongoing gross systematic and widespread human rights violations, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity. In his report, the SR highlighted the ongoing politically motivated repression of civil society in Belarus and a total crackdown on freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as severe ill-treatment in detention facilities and cases of death and custody. Germany welcomes the recent release of Sergei Tikhanovsky and 13 other political prisoners, and it stands in solidarity with those who are still detained under inhumane conditions simply for standing up for their fundamental human rights and freedoms. Germany urges the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and to hold those responsible for ill-treatment, torture and death in detention to account.

Ireland notes with concern that the people of Belarus have been continually denied a real voice in the governing of their country. The presidential election of January 2025, like that of 2020, cannot be considered to have been free or fair. In failing to ensure OSCE's ability to monitor this year's presidential election, the Belarusian authorities have once again failed to fulfil their international obligations. Ireland shares the SR's concern at the continuing repression of civil society and the findings of no overall improvement in the state of civil and political rights in the country. The Belarusian authorities' systematic and widespread violations of human rights and restrictions on political participation and access to independent media are intended to stifle opposition voices and democratic processes. Ireland condemns the politically motivated arrest and detention of Belarusian citizens, as well as the torture and ill-treatment of prisoners. The routine denial of the right to a fair trial and stranglehold over legal professionals has resulted in a legal system that lacks independence. While noting the recent limited release of political prisoners, Ireland reiterates its call on Belarus to immediately release all political prisoners without conditions.

Italy remains gravely concerned by the human rights situation in Belarus and continues to stand with the people of Belarus and the democratic opposition in exile in their pursuit of freedom, justice and democratic aspirations. Italy strongly condemns the repression of political and civil rights, including freedom of opinion and expression, assembly and association by the Belarusian government. While the recent release of political prisoners is a welcome development which should further continue, arbitrary detention, reported ill-treatment of detainees and continuous silencing of dissent raise serious human rights concerns. It is particularly troubling that Belarus remains the only country in Europe that still applies the death penalty. Italy reiterates its call for the Belarusian government to uphold its international human rights obligation. At the same time, Italy remains committed to avoiding harm to the Belarusian population. Efforts should focus on preserving people-to-people contacts and supporting civil society actors.



Latvia on behalf of the Nordic Baltic countries asserts that the state of human rights and lack of accountability in Belarus is intolerable. The Belarusian authorities continue to carry out systemic repressions, eradication of dissent, closure of nearly 2,000 NGOs, and a complete crackdown on human rights. The sham elections were devoid of legitimacy and failed any international standards. Especially deplorable are trials in absentia, arbitrary arrests, sexual and gender-based violence, especially against women, and other severe ill-treatment of detainees. The Nordic-Baltic countries are equally appalled by the politically motivated forced imposition of psychiatric treatment. Some violations may amount to crimes against humanity. They demand the Belarusian authorities to release all of the nearly 1,200 political prisoners, to cease repression of civil society, human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, trade unionists, and LGBTQI community and dissenting voices. The instrumentalization of migrants on the EU border by Belarus must stop. The international community must hold Belarusian authorities fully accountable for all human rights violations, as well as for complicity in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Malta remains gravely concerned by the systemic repression of civil and political rights in Belarus. The continued targeting of individuals both within the country and in exile and the persistent use of politically motivated prosecutions reflect an entrenched disregard for fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. While welcoming the recent release of political prisoners in Belarus, Malta continues to condemn the ongoing detention of other political prisoners and join the call for their immediate and unconditional release, as well as their full rehabilitation. Malta urges Belarus to fully cooperate with international human rights mechanisms and to take immediate steps to restore the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including for independent media and civil society. It also reiterates its call for the abolition of the death penalty and, as a first step, the introduction of a moratorium. Finally, Malta expresses its deep concern by Belarus' continued involvement in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and reiterates the urgent call to ensure the safe return of all unlawfully deported Ukrainian children.

Moldova notes with regret that the situation in the country continues to be of concern. The reported crackdown on freedom of expression, assembly, and association is deeply worrying. These measures have a negative impact on genuine electoral competition. Moldova regrets that the last elections in Belarus were held without OSCE observers and calls on the authorities to reconsider the position in this regard. While welcoming the presidential pardons of those detained on politically motivated grounds, Moldova reiterates its concern at the continuation of such practise, as well as alleged inhuman conditions of detention and ill-treatment practises against prisoners. Reported restrictions on those released and pressure exercised over families of those detained are equally concerning. Moldova welcomes Belarus' engagement with Special procedures by regularly responding to communications during the reporting period and encourage to continue this practise through full and meaningful cooperation with mandate holders and by granting full access in the country. In closing, Moldova reiterates its call on Belarus to stop any support to Russia's unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine.

The **Netherlands on behalf of the Benelux countries** remains deeply concerned at the persistent, brutal repression, the complete crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly and association, as well as the ill-treatment of prisoners, including the more than 1,000



prisoners that remain behind bars on politically motivated charges. The Benelux countries are also alarmed by the increase of cases of extraterritorial persecution, including through *in absentia* trials against individuals who fled Belarus, which are detailed in the report. While welcoming the recent release of 14 political prisoners by the Belarusian authorities, the Benelux countries continue to call on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all remaining political prisoners. In closing, they are deeply troubled by signs of malnutrition, maltreatment, and torture exhibited by those who were released, signs which are consistent with reports that penitentiary staff routinely engage in intentional ill-treatment.

Poland acknowledges the recent release by Belarus of a group of 14 prisoners, including Sergei Tikhanovsky and three Polish citizens, in the hope that this development, along with other reported pardons, mark a step towards the release and rehabilitation of all those unjustly detained by the Belarusian authorities. At the same time, Poland regrets that the ongoing repression and the high number of political prisoners indicate no enduring improvement in the area of civil and political rights in Belarus. Poland strongly condemn the crackdown of freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as misuse of counterterrorism and anti-extremism legislation to persecute political opponents, civil society organisations and journalists. Noting that the repression reached also those who fled Belarus through *in absentia* trials, pressure on their families and exploration of property, Poland reiterates its condemnation of Belarus' involvement in Russia's aggression against Ukraine and denounce the cynical use of migrants as a political instrument.

The **Republic of Korea** remains deeply concerned about the ongoing repression of fundamental freedoms in Belarus, including restrictions of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. As of January 2025, over 100 civil society representatives remained in detention and the campaign to forcibly liquidate NGOs continued. The report also highlights that the recent presidential election was held in the context of the complete eradication of those freedoms. Korea is particularly alarmed by reports of severe ill-treatment in detention, including life-threatening conditions and the absence of mental health support for prisoners at risk of suicide. While the SR addressed five communications to the government, no investigations seems to have been followed up. In this regard, it is important that Belarus fulfil its international obligations and ensure accountability for human rights violations.

Romania underlines that the findings outlined in the SR's report are deeply concerning, revealing that systemic repression, erosion of civic space and instrumentalization of the legal system to silence dissent and stifle civic society is still very much present in Belarus. Romania expresses serious alarm at the continuing and widespread deterioration of civil and political rights in Belarus, especially the still ongoing detention and inhumane treatment of over 1,100 individuals recognised as political prisoners, as well as the targeting of exiled Belarusians through trials in *absentia*, restrictions on nationality and documentation, and reprisals against family members. Arbitrary detention and attacks targeting protesters, journalists, human rights defenders and opposition members remain widespread. These actions are going against Belarus' own obligations under international law. Romania calls on Belarus to engage meaningfully with all international human rights mechanisms and to cease its persistent refusal to cooperate with the SR's mandate.



Slovenia, while noting the release of 14 political prisoners, Slovenia remains deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Belarus and urges its government to fully acknowledge and pursue accountability for the widespread and systematic human rights violations committed since August 2020, including arbitrary detention, torture, ill-treatment of political prisoners and assaults on lawyers, journalists and civil society. Slovenia calls on Belarus to fully cooperate with UN and regional human rights bodies and mechanisms, including by granting unhindered access to their territory and by ensuring the effective implementation of all related recommendations. Once again, Slovenia calls on Belarusian authorities to stop enabling Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine and to enable the safe return of all unlawfully deported and transferred Ukrainian children.

Switzerland notes with concern that the human rights situation in Belarus remains characterised by systematic and widespread repression. The presidential elections this year took place against the backdrop of a complete lack of guarantees on the right of freedom of expression, peaceful meeting and association, and without any other viable political alternative being on the ballot. The crackdowns and repression we're seeing are not just targeting persons within the country but have been extended to target the diaspora as well. Criminal trials in absentia targeting exiled persons as well as the criminalisation of any acts of solidarity with prisoners are a particularly alarming form of abuse. Switzerland condemns the deeply troubling detention conditions in the country. Forced labour, incommunicado detention, a lack of medical care, sexual and psychological violence, and the forced dissemination of penance videos. All of this violates the absolute ban on torture, nail treatment. Human dignity and personality privilege must be respected. Given the circumstances, the recent release of certain political prisoners is a positive step but the fact that a further 1,200 persons have been arbitrarily detained and new waves of arrests are sources of ongoing concern. A selective release in no way compensates for the lack of the rule of law and justice in the country.

Ukraine notes with concern that civil and political rights in Belarus remain severely restricted, with an ongoing systematic crackdown on freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, fostering an atmosphere of fear and repression throughout the country. Of particular concern are the systematic reports of ill-treatment in detention, arbitrary arrests and collective punishment of individuals and their families. The regime continues to target political opponents, civil society, journalists and trade unionists. While noting the release of some political prisoners, including Sergei Tikhanovsky, this cannot compensate the continued detention of over a thousand others, nor the widespread use of torture and inhumane treatment in prisons, abuses confirmed by Mr. Tikhanovsky following his release. Ukraine urges the Belarusian authorities to cease their complicity in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, noting the reported and forced disappearances of Ukrainian prisoners of war transferred to the Russian Federation through the territory of Belarus. Ukraine further urges the SR to address in future reports Belarus' role in the unlawful deportation and militarisation of Ukrainian children held in camps on its territory. In closing, it calls on Belarus to fully uphold its international human rights obligation and to engage in genuine cooperation with UN mechanisms.

The **United Kingdom** remains gravely concerned by the persistent and worsening human rights situation in Belarus. The systematic repression of civil society, independent media and political opposition continues unabated. Reports of arbitrary detention, torture and forced labour in



detention facilities are alarming. While welcoming the recent release of several political prisoners as a moment of hope, the UK urges Belarus to unconditionally release the nearly 1,200 individuals who remain unjustly detained for exercising their fundamental rights. The UK is further concerned by the targeting of women and girls, including gender-based violence and discriminatory practises. The extraterritorial reach of repression, including threats to exile Belarusians, is also deeply troubling. The UK is following closely reports of the transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus. Any such actions must be transparent, voluntary and in line with international humanitarian and human rights law.

Views Expressed by intergovernmental Organizations and UN Agencies

The **European Union** expresses serious concern at the findings of the SR and strongly condemns the ongoing gross, systematic, and widespread human rights violations, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity. The EU urges the Belarusian authorities to halt their internal and transnational repression and to adhere to its international human rights obligations. The EU echoes the SR's calls for investigations and accountability for all cases of ill-treatment, torture, and appalling detention conditions. The EU acknowledges the release of 14 political prisoners, including Sergei Tikhanovsky, who was held under deplorable conditions, as a positive step after prolonged injustice. Reiterating the call for the release of all political prisoners, the EU urges Belarus to stop the repression against media, human rights defenders, lawyers, trade union leaders, and LGBTI persons. The EU continues to urge the Belarusian authorities to stop their involvement in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and to halt their instrumentalization of migrants in complicity with Russia. The EU reiterates its urgent call on Belarus to immediately ensure the safe return of all unlawfully deported Ukrainian children.

Views Expressed by Non-Governmental Organizations

The **Belarusian Helsinki Committee** notes with concern that the human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate, with more than 1,100 political prisoners still behind bars, despite the release of hundreds of individuals over the past year. The Committee welcomes every release and urges the Belarusian authorities to proceed and accelerate this process. It also commends the efforts of all diplomats working towards the release of political prisoners, especially those from the United States. Political prisoners are still kept in inhumane and degrading conditions. In 2025, another political prisoner died in custody, bringing the known number of such deaths to eight. At least seven individuals remain held incommunicado for periods ranging from six months to over two years, ahead of the 2025 elections somewhere shown in propaganda broadcasts, confirming their life, but not ending their isolation. Repression in Belarus now affects not only civil and political rights, but also economic, social and cultural. In pursuit of ideological conformity, the state provides education that neglects its core purposes - the development of the human personality, respect for human rights, tolerance and peace. In the labour sphere, restrictive measures target those deemed disloyal, limiting their employment opportunities and forcing self-censorship. As a result, access to essential services, including health care, education and legal aid, is also worsening. The Committee calls on UNHRC members to keep a sharp focus on the situation in Belarus and to use every appropriate means to encourage the authorities to unconditionally release all political prisoners and put an end to political repressions in Belarus.



The **Right Livelihood Award Foundation** jointly with Viasna note that the human rights situation in Belarus remains extremely dire. Repression targeting civil society, human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and those connected to the 2020 protests continues relentlessly. Solidarity is being criminalised and the families of political prisoners continue to face reprisals. Communication with relatives and legal representatives is heavily restricted and often weaponised as a form of pressure and punishment against political prisoners. Since 2020, over 6,990 individuals have been convicted on politically motivated charges. Alarming, at least 33 people have been subjected to forced psychiatric treatment. They express deeply concern at the fact that the members of the Viasna Human Rights Centre remain behind bars in inhumane and degrading conditions. Among them are Ales Bialiatski, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Right Livelihood Award winner, and his colleagues Valentin Stefanovich, Valiantsin Labkovich, and Maria Rabkova, imprisoned solely for their illegitimate human rights work. As the human rights crisis in Belarus deepens, the Foundation calls on the UNHRC to urge the Belarusian authorities to release all political prisoners immediately and unconditionally and to end the ongoing crackdown on civil society.

War Resisters International (WRI) stresses that repressive laws and policies continue to target grassroots civil society organisations and human rights defenders such as and Olga Karatch, who received already a first sentence. WRI draws the Council's attention to the lack of the full implementation of the right to conscientious objection to military service. The alternative service continues to be punitive and the authorities use stigma and public censorship against conscientious objectors. Websites and telegram channels assisting conscientious objectors are declared extremist and extremism is punishable by up to seven years. It is also concerning the increasing militarisation of the society, including the educational system leading to underage exposure to militaristic trainings. WRI calls on the UNHRC to ensure the protection of those whose lives are threatened and urges Belarus to respect the human right to conscientious objection and the UNGA resolution on death penalty. WRI further calls on individual member states to grant asylum to Belarusian conscientious objectors in line with the UNHCR guidelines on international protection and ensure dignified living conditions for Belarusian asylum seekers.

The **International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute** (IBAHRI), ICJ, and Lawyers for Lawyers Canada reiterate their condemnation of the ongoing repression of civil society in Belarus, in particular systematic reprisals against lawyers representing political opposition figures who are acting in defence of human rights or the rule of law. Deploring the full subordination of the judiciary to executive control and attacks against independent lawyers representing dissenting voices, they are particularly concerned by the erosion of the institutional independence of the legal profession in Belarus, notably through the Minister of Justice's interference in licencing and disciplinary procedures, and the Bar Association's failure to protect its members. While acknowledging the recent release of 14 political prisoners, including Sergei Tsikhanouski, too many others remain arbitrarily detained and systematic persecution of those exercising dissent persists. They call for the immediate release of Maxim Znak, arbitrarily detained and held incommunicado since 2020, as well as lawyers Danilevich, Brahinet, Lazarenka, Yurhilevich, and Barodka, convicted in unfair trials. Belarus, as a party to the UNCAT and ICCPR, is bound by its international obligations to respect and ensure the right of fair trial, freedom from torture in treatment, and independence of the legal profession. They urge



Belarusian authorities to immediately release all individuals that are arbitrarily detained for political reasons, including lawyers, and end the further persecution.

Human Rights House Foundation stresses that, while welcoming limited political prisoner releases, the imprisonment should never have occurred in the first place, and conditional pardons cannot erase years of unjust punishment. The Foundation urges all states to withhold any rapprochement until Belarus shows systemic progress. That must begin with unconditionally releasing the more than 1,000 remaining political prisoners, including human rights defenders such as Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski and his colleagues Valentin Stefanovich, Valiantsin Labkovich, and Maria Rabkova. Their continued detention in harsh conditions remains untenable. In addition, it calls on Belarus to end incommunicado detention and ill-treatment, restore legal status of liquidated NGOs and allow their work, repeal restrictive and repressive laws, and engage with the Council's Belarus mechanisms. Until these steps are taken, Belarus will remain in the SR's words under the shadow of repression.

The **International Council for Supporting Fair Trial and Human Rights** witness widespread and sweeping violations of human rights, of which some amount to crimes against humanity according to the GIE on Belarus. Arbitrary arrest due to political reasons is common. Over 1,200 people are behind bars in Belarus. This is not a domestic issue, but it has spilled over regionally because there is a link between Belarus and the Gulf region, where Saudi Arabia and UAE are economic partners of this country, and there is strong economic ties between the two parties. This cooperation, however constructive at its face, should not give legitimacy to the blatant violations of human rights inside Belarus. When countries like UAE deals with oppressive regime, this means that this relationship might be interpreted as an implicit acceptance of these violations, particularly that the two countries exercise oppressions like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This behaviour might be seen as an indirect support of the oppressive regime in Belarus impinging on human rights. Economic and security cooperation should not be used to further ignore the plight of the people of Belarus.

Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI) regrets that the SR, while detailing the continued repression of Belarusians within the country, did not repeat his predecessor's comments on the situation of Belarusians abroad. Restrictions on consular services introduced during the previous year remain in place. In particular, Belarusians anywhere in the world cannot renew their passports without returning to Belarus, where they may face arrest, imprisonment and ill treatment on trumped-up charges or other persecution as presumed government opponents, and may be prevented from leaving the country again, rendering them at risk to forced military enlistment. CPTI hopes the SR will continue to intercede with states everywhere to give all the assistance in their power to Belarusians who, having left the country as government opponents, human rights activists, or to avoid conscription or military mobilisation, find themselves or their children in a situation of effective or actual statelessness. The UN itself could do more to help Belarusians. Just last month, consideration of the application for ECOSOC consultative status from the respected Belarusian human rights organisation OUR HOUSE, based in exile in Lithuania, was deferred by yet one more year. Everything that is done to muffle critical voices gives further succour to the current administration in Minsk.



The **International Federation of Human Rights Leagues** (FIDH), OMCT and Viasna express their solidarity and their great relief over the recent liberation of 14 political prisoners, including blogger and activist Sergey Tikhanovsky, who had been held incommunicado for more than two years. They are deeply concerned and disheartened by his testimony, which once again confirms the systematic use of torture and inhumane treatment in Belarusian prisons. At the same time, according to Human Rights Centre Viasna, more than 1,100 individuals remain unlawfully imprisoned, and the real numbers might be significantly higher. Among them are Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, FIDH Vice President Valentin Stefanovich, Viasna lawyer Valiantsin Labkovich, Viasna's volunteer coordinator Maria Rabkova, and Nastya Loika. All of them face similar cruel and appalling conditions, often without access to legal counsel, leaving them utterly vulnerable. At the same time, the Belarusian KGB is escalating its insidious practise of transnational persecution, threatening and harassing both Belarusians in exile and those remaining in the country. They strongly urge the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all members of Human Rights Centre Viasna, as well as all those unlawfully imprisoned on politically motivated charges. They further urge the international community to take all available measures to ensure accountability and justice for the crimes against humanity committed. This must include urgently referring the situation to the International Criminal Court. Finally, they call on all states to provide robust protection, including visa support for Belarusians who are forced to exile and their relatives remaining at risk.

Article 19 – The International Centre Against Censorship shares the SR's view that Belarus continues to live under a shadow of repression with a systemic onslaught on the freedom of expression online and offline. Article 19 welcomes the recent release of 14 political prisoners, including Sergei Tikhanovsky, who spent over 700 days incommunicado. Over 1,000 people remain behind bars for exercising their rights. The testimonies and physical conditions of those recently freed starkly reveal the inhumane and degrading treatment endured in detention. Belarusian authorities continue to exploit vaguely worded anti-extremism laws to quash dissent. Since 2020, the Attorney-General has reported over 22,500 so-called extremist offences. List branding activists as extremists and terrorists are weaponised. In 2023, human rights defender and now political prisoner Nastya Loika was sentenced to seven years in prison for documenting rights violations and recognised as terrorist, a designation cutting her off from financial support equated to financing of terrorism. Article 19 urges the UNHRC to call upon the Belarusian authorities to uphold their obligations, starting with the immediate and unconditional release of Nastya Loika and all other political prisoners. It further calls for unrestricted access to detention facilities, independent monitoring and regular reporting on the well-being of all those still arbitrarily detained.

Ingénieurs du Monde gives the floor to Sergei Tikhanovsky who was tortured, held in solitary confinement, and was frozen. He was not even given a pen to write a few words. For years, he did not receive a single letter, not even from his daughter. They filled his ears with lies and propaganda. They tried to convince him that everyone had forgotten him. What is happening in Belarusian prisons is not law enforcement. It is torture, abuse and the destruction of human beings. People are literally being killed behind bars. Sergei extends his gratitude to international solidarity, especially the US administration. Now he wants everyone to be free. More than a thousand people are still behind bars. He calls for action to free each and every one of them. The



United Nations must act. This is not politics. This is a humanitarian issue. It is not even just a human rights issue. It is a matter of life and death. Sergei urges UNSG to intervene, to use everyone's resources to save these lives and to speak out about what is happening in the very heart of Europe. To all Belarusians, keep fighting, because freedom is the most precious thing a person has, and it belongs to everyone, not just the chosen few.

FACTS & FIGURES ON ID PARTICIPATION

21 State Delegations

1 Inter-Governmental Organization

10 Non-Governmental Organizations