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ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

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Interactive Dialogue with the Group of Independent Experts on Belarus

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PRESENTATION OF THE THEMATIC REPORT

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In accordance with its mandate, the Group of Experts introduces its latest [thematic report](#) to recommend [accountability measures](#) aimed at ending impunity, addressing its root causes, and ensuring justice, effective remedies, and reparations for victims. The thematic report details options to counter the deeply ingrained culture of impunity in Belarus - options which reflect the aspirations of Belarusian citizens who have shared their vision with us for a lasting transition grounded in justice. The Group of Independent Experts is privileged to be their voice. At a time when international law faces extraordinary challenges, this thematic report places any prospect of accountability Belarus within [existing international and national legal frameworks](#).

Since 1 May 2020, as repeatedly reported to the Council, thousands of Belarusians have been arrested and arbitrarily detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, opinion, assembly, and association. Many have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment during arrest and detention facilities, and hundreds of thousands more have been forced into exile. The Group of Experts has determined that some of these violations constitute crimes against humanity, specifically [political persecution and imprisonment](#).



While the **recent release of Sergei Tikhanovsky** and other political prisoners after years of their arbitrary detention is welcome, it does not change today's reality. Serious violations and crimes that began in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election continue. Belarusians are entitled to expect that their State will meet its obligations under international law to hold perpetrators accountable. Yet Belarus has shown both **inability and unwillingness to investigate or prosecute** international crimes. Since May 2020, there have been no genuine investigations or disciplinary proceedings against alleged perpetrators. On the contrary, officials allegedly implicated in gross violations have been promoted or even celebrated.

At the centre of this **culture of impunity** stands the President of Belarus. Based on four years of victim and witness testimony, defectors' accounts, and extensive documentation, the Group of Experts has reasonable grounds to believe that President Lukashenko, along with other senior officials identified in the Group's report, established and implemented a **policy to suppress dissent and maintain power** in 2020. He exploited the State apparatus to preserve his authority and played a significant role in perpetrating these violations and crimes.

With **no credible prospect of accountability** within Belarus, victims are turning to the international community for responses. Domestic courts cannot offer reliable redress. However, States have acted through referrals to the International Criminal Court, domestic investigations, diplomatic efforts, and targeted sanctions. The thematic report considers several additional avenues, such as inter-state litigation before the International Court of Justice to establish responsibility for violating the Convention against Torture.

However, judicial measures alone are insufficient. Any effort to combat impunity must also guarantee **victims' rights to truth, reparation**, and assurances of non-recurrence. Comprehensive strategies are required to dismantle the system of repression and create a movement toward justice. The Group of Experts will continue to serve as a platform for truth and accountability for the victims of Belarus. The Experts count on the UNHRC to join them in a shared purpose - ending impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations and international crimes in Belarus. Given the gravity of the findings, the Group of Experts strongly recommends that no business enterprise operating in Belarus maintain financial or economic ties with members of the security forces or with companies owned or controlled by them. This is especially critical regarding **private military and security companies** active in Belarus.

Endowed with independent status, the UNHRC-mandated Group of Experts has repeatedly requested in all its letters and at the UNHRC that the Belarusian authorities enter into dialogue with the Group. The Experts have recommended that the Belarusian authorities to present their position and arguments, but they have not yet responded. Their main argument consists of an alleged interference in the internal affairs of Belarus. These ideas are hopelessly outdated.

In the 21st century, people should not be **defenceless against the arbitrariness of the authorities**. The authorities cannot violate human rights with impunity. Humanity has long since developed minimum standards of respect for human rights. The state conducts its policy independently, without interference from outside, but the international community has the right and the duty to assess gross deviations from the human rights agreements by which a country is bound.



REPLIES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Ms. Monika Płatek, Member of the Group of Independent Experts, referring to ways for the international community to ensure accountability for and cease of serious human rights violation taking place in Belarus, explains that the Group of Experts welcomes the opening of the preliminary examination of the situation by the **Prosecutor's Office** of the ICC initiated by Lithuania. This offers a good example of the way member states can work to promote accountability through viable avenues within international justice mechanism in addition to the use of universal and extra territorial jurisdiction in response to long standing calls for victims and civil society. The Group of Experts also commends some member states' efforts in conducting relevant criminal proceedings in national jurisdictions outside Belarus, as one means to advance accountability on the basis of the principles of **extraterritorial or universal jurisdiction**.

Leveraging the International Court of Justice for Belarus' systematic violation of the state's obligation under the United Nations **Convention against Torture** (UNCAT) is, again, another venue that would merit consideration by state parties to the UNCAT. In parallel, member states can explore further targeted measures against credibly alleged perpetrators of grave human rights violation and abuses in accordance with international law.

In addition to possible prosecution, efforts to collect, document, and **preserve evidence** of the violation must continue. The Group of Experts continues to collect and preserve evidence with a view to assisting accountability processes. In addition, it has compiled files on individuals and entities that it has **reasonable ground to believe** bear responsibility for gross human rights violations, including those which amount to crimes under international law.

Accountability also encompasses **non-judicial mechanism** including **truth-seeking** and various measures to prevent the recurrence of new violations, constitutional, legal and institutional reforms, the strengthening of civil society, memorialization efforts, cultural initiatives, the preservation of archives and the reform of history education. It is extremely important to support critical role that is played by civil society present in Belarus in collecting evidence of abuses.

The Group of Experts stand ready to provide also **technical assistance** to the government of Belarus in its effort to provide recognition to victim, enhance the truth of individuals in state situation, reinforce respect for human rights and promote the rule of law as a step toward reconciliation and the prevention of new violations. Noteworthy to stress that in fact it is Belarusian law and the Belarusian Constitution that are not observed by the Belarusian State.

Turning to **deportations**, **Ms. Susan Bazilli, Member of the Group of Independent Experts** explains that the Group of Experts is investigating allegations of human rights violations committed in the context of the release of political prisoners, including the allegations of deportation. The Group of Experts has already identified numerous investigative leads that it will be following up with regard to political prisoners recently released and it will be reporting on their findings in March 2026. To encourage **further releases of political prisoners**, the Group of Experts encourages the diplomatic community to continue to liaise with Belarus to release political prisoners in accordance with international human rights law and humanitarian standards, reinforcing in accordance with international law and humanitarian standards.



Since the mandate of the Group of Experts became operational, Belarusian president Lukashenko has **pardoned dozens of people** who have been convicted for participating in the 2020 protests. These pardoned have reportedly admitted guilt, sincerely repented for what they did and committed to a law-abiding way of life. The Experts further note the recent significant release of **high-profile political prisoners**. However, once more, the full circumstances of these releases have been marred with human rights violations and abuses themselves.

Indeed, these high-profile releases represent only a small number of those arrested and should not conceal today's reality in Belarus, which is characterized by gross human rights violations and related crimes against humanity that are continuing to take place. Despite the release of these political prisoners by the government, measures of **repression and intimidation** aimed at suppressing dissent and further reducing civic space persist, as many of the speakers here today have also reinforced. Security forces have continued to conduct arrests with heavy handed tactics, resorting to violence, threats and intimidation even when facing no resistance. And of the numbers of political prisoners who have been released, approximately **170, 283 have been newly arrested**.

To ensure accountability, the Group of Experts recommends pursuing criminal proceedings outside Belarus under the **universal jurisdiction and extra-territorial principles** and stresses the need to continue collecting and preserving evidence of violations. In addition to possible prosecutions, efforts to collect, document and preserve evidence of these violations must continue. Member states can also consider targeted measures against alleged perpetrators provided they are lawful, proportionate, time limited and subject to independent human rights safeguards and monitoring. Leveraging the ICJ for Belarus' systemic violations of state obligations under the **UN Convention against Torture** is another avenue that would merit consideration by state parties to the UNCAT. States may also coordinate effectively with other states to **support civil society** engaged in accountability efforts at the national and regional level which can include information sharing, provision of mutual legal assistance and technical support.

The Group of Experts continues to collect and preserve evidence with a view to assisting accountability processes. In addition, the Group of Experts has compiled files on individuals and entities that it has **reasonable grounds to believe** bear responsibility for gross human rights violations including those which amount to crimes against international law. The Group of Experts has also prepared a consolidated analysis of all state units and entities involved in the commission of these violations and have a dedicated member of their team whose work it is to **establish the chain of command**. Drawing to a close, Ms. Susan BAZILLI further explains that the Group of Experts has compiled, analysed and preserved relevant public statements from high level Belarusian officials and mapped out all detention facilities in which torture, cruel and inhuman and degrading treatment have been documented.

VIEWS EXPRESSED BY BELARUS AS CONCERNED COUNTRY

The delegation of **Belarus** begins by reiterating its well-established position that it does not recognise any country mandates established by the Human Rights Council on the initiative of a group of countries in relation to Belarus. Neither the so-called Group of Experts nor the Special Rapporteur can be considered mechanisms of international cooperation on human rights, the



development of which should be the responsibility of the Council. The purpose of these entities is to systematically discredit Belarus in order to justify and legitimise the policy of political pressure and economic sanctions that the European Union and a number of other countries are pursuing against Belarus in pursuit of their geopolitical objectives.

The documents fabricated by the Group are an irresponsible compilation of fabrications and manipulations of facts, commissioned and biased assessments, the production and distribution of which cost a fortune. The methods of pressure and sanctions that a group of Western countries has been trying to apply to Belarus for 30 years are not working. The delegation of Belarus calls on the initiators of the country-specific mandate on the human rights situation in Belarus at the Human Rights Council to stop adding fuel to the fire of confrontation and fruitless polemics, which annually devours UN resources instead of directing them towards solving the real problems of people in need.

For the people of Belarus, sovereignty and independence are of absolute value. Belarus insists on its right, protected by the UN Charter, to independently determine the path of development of the Belarusian state and to shape its foreign and domestic policies. Belarus has been and remains a responsible member of the international community. Belarus is interested in dialogue, and knows how to constructively accept justified criticism and work towards the maximum implementation of international human rights standards within the framework of universally agreed approaches, rather than in the arbitrary sense of ‘an order based on someone else’s rules’.

Despite the continuing bias in the work of the UNHRC in favour of non-consensual country mandates, Belarus believes that the UNHRC has constructive potential and that states are interested in cooperating on the basis of equal and mutually respectful dialogue, without politicisation and attempts to impose a single narrow template on all countries that denies national contexts. A different approach destroys multilateralism and will expand the practice of non-cooperation by governments, with mechanisms that are inherently politically motivated and programmed to exert pressure, and in essence parasitise on human rights. In closing, Belarus notes in particular that most non-Western countries are refraining from participating in today’s meeting. The monologue of the Group of Independent Experts and its founders demonstrates the futility of this format of work.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

Regional and Cross-Regional Groups

The **European Union** thanks the Group of Independent Experts and expresses its strong support for their work. The EU strongly condemns the ongoing gross, systematic and widespread human rights violations, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity, and the closed civic space, including the systematic dismantling of civil society. The prevailing impunity for these violations is unacceptable. The EU will support all efforts to ensure accountability and victims’ rights to justice and full and effective reparation. The EU calls for effective and impartial investigations into and accountability for all cases of ill-treatment, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, and appalling detention conditions that may have led to deaths in custody. While welcoming recent waves of releases of political prisoners and taking note with appreciation of the recent release of 52 prisoners, the EU recognizes that new arrests and re-arrests continue.



Therefore, the EU continues to urge the immediate and unconditional release and effective rehabilitation of all political prisoners as well as the end of the repression of free, independent and pluralistic media. The EU stresses the obligation to uphold the rights of political prisoners, including the right to due process and a fair trial, and the duty to safeguard their human dignity, while ensuring they have access to legal representation, medical care and contact with their families. The EU continues to urge the Belarusian authorities to abolish the death penalty, and as a first step, to introduce a moratorium. The EU urges the Belarusian authorities to halt their internal as well as transnational repression, to adhere to the country's international obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, including the fundamental rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, and to cooperate fully with international and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms. In closing, the EU urges Belarus to stop its involvement in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; to immediately ensure the safe return to Ukraine of all unlawfully deported Ukrainian children; and to halt the instrumentalization of migrants for political purposes, in complicity with Russia.

Lithuania on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic states¹ takes the floor through H. E. Mr. Kęstutis Budrys, **Minister of Foreign Affairs** of the Republic of Lithuania. The Nordic-Baltic states remain deeply troubled by the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus - the systematic eradication of civil society, politically motivated sentences leading to degrading conditions of detention and the systematic use of torture, including sexual and gender-based violence. Legislative changes aim to eliminate any potential dissent and enable misuse of the justice system for political purposes. Hundreds of NGOs are closed, as arbitrary arrests and persecutions of journalists, human rights defenders, and activists continue. With over a thousand political prisoners in Belarus, the cycle of releases and arrests persists. Only sustained international pressure - non-recognition, isolation and sanctions - can break this vicious cycle. The Nordic-Baltic states condemn these authoritarian practices, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity, and demand the immediate and unconditional release and effective rehabilitation of all political prisoners. They urge Belarus to cease immediately the instrumentalization of migrants for political purposes pushing them into the EU. Identification and prosecution of perpetrators of these crimes, human rights violations and abuses is essential to ending Belarus's impunity. In closing, the Nordic-Baltic states reiterate their call on Belarus to cease its involvement in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its complicity in the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children.

The **Netherlands on behalf of the Benelux countries²** thanks the Group of Experts for their comprehensive and thorough report, whose conclusions are stark. Since 2020, the Belarusian authorities have pursued deliberate and coordinated campaign of repression. Peaceful citizens, human rights defenders and democratic voices have faced arbitrary detention, torture and systematic persecution. The Benelux countries are appalled by the persistent use of torture, arbitrary detention and sham trials, targeting civil society, independent voices and ordinary Belarusians exercising their fundamental rights. Instead of upholding justice, the authorities have turned Belarus' institutions into instruments of oppression, including the persistent and growing practice of transnational repression. Victims are silenced, lawyers are harassed, while

¹ Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden.

² Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.



perpetrators are shielded from any type of accountability and impunity has become entrenched. Even if prisoners were released, many more remain unjustly imprisoned. The Benelux countries reiterate their call for genuine accountability and for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and their effective rehabilitation and urge the Belarusian authorities to end their campaign of repression. Welcoming the Group's mapping of avenues for justice, the Benelux countries asks the Independent Experts to elaborate on how the international community came most effectively support Belarusian victims' right to truth.

State Delegations

Albania thanks the Group of Experts on Belarus for its in-depth report highlighting the systematic and widespread serious human rights violations affecting the whole of Belarusian society. Albania remains deeply concerned about the persistence of arbitrary arrests, acts of torture, incommunicado detention and unfair trials, which the Group of Experts qualifies as crimes against humanity. Strongly condemning these human rights violations, Albania calls for the perpetrators to be held accountable. Political repression continues and political expression is criminalised. Opposition groups are banned. Despite the recent release of a few political prisoners by Belarus, Albania is alarmed by the detention of more than 1,200 political prisoners. In this regard, Albania reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in the country. Civic and cultural space is stifled and freedom of expression is disregarded. Independent media have been silenced. Albania commends the efforts of Belarusian civil society, which, despite the risks, continues to document violations and call for justice. Finally, Albania calls on the Council to maintain close monitoring of the situation and to support all efforts to end impunity in the country.

Australia thanks the Group of Experts for their sobering update. The Australian government is deeply concerned and dismayed by reports of deaths in custody of political prisoners arbitrarily detained in Belarus for exercising their legitimate rights to freedoms of opinion and belief, expression and association. Supporting calls for a full investigation into these deaths in custody, Australia calls for the immediate release of political prisoners who continue to be arbitrarily detained. Australia supports the democratic aspirations of Belarusians for a free, democratic and independent Belarus, and commends Belarusian civil society organizations and human rights defenders including those in exile who continue to undertake vital work in increasingly challenging conditions. Australia reiterates its calls on the Belarusian authorities to comply with their international human rights obligations including to uphold the civil and political rights of Belarusians. Reiterating its condemnation of the Belarusian Government's complicity in the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, Australia calls on Belarus to immediately cease its support for Russia's illegal invasion. In closing, Australia asks how the international community could ensure that the Belarusian government is held accountable for the ill-treatment and deaths of those political prisoners arbitrarily detained in Belarus.

Austria welcomes the updates by the Group of Experts and is troubled by the persecution, criminalization and arbitrary detention of persons expressing dissenting opinions and those perceived as having opposing views. While welcoming recent releases of political prisoners, Austria continues to urge Belarus to halt the repressions against all sectors of civil society, independent media, independent trade unions, lawyers and opposition groups and cease



harassments and reprisals against individuals exercising their human rights. Austria is particularly concerned by the appalling conditions of detention of political prisoners and to continued reports of deaths, torture and ill treatment or denial of access to adequate medical treatment and detention. Reiterating its call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, Austria is deeply concerned by systematic violations of due process and the right to fair trial of persons perceived as opponents of the government. It calls on Belarus to ensure fair trial and due process including access to legal assistance without interference. Austria urges Belarus to respect, protect and fulfill human rights in compliance with its obligations under international human rights law and to cooperate with the Group of Experts and all relevant human rights mechanisms and investigations. In closing, Austria reiterates its full support for the Expert's mandate and the important work in documenting the human rights situations in Belarus.

Bulgaria welcomes the report of the Group of Experts on Belarus and reiterates its support for their work. Bulgaria remains deeply concerned by the ongoing systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country. In particular, Bulgaria is alarmed by the continuing shrinking of civic space and limitations on the freedom of speech and peaceful assembly, the repression of critical voices and politically motivated arrests. Bulgaria continues to call on Belarus to respect fundamental freedoms and human rights and comply with the obligations under international law and international human rights law. While acknowledging the recent release of political prisoners, Bulgaria calls on the Belarusian authorities to unconditionally release and rehabilitate all remaining political prisoners and conduct thorough and transparent investigations into all alleged human rights violations. Bulgaria urges Belarus to ensure accountability for the perpetrators and guarantee timely justice and adequate remedy and preparation for the victims. It further urges the Belarusian authorities to refrain from any action that may aid and facilitate the Russian illegal and unjustified and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine.

Czechia welcomes the recent release of political prisoners, including Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty journalist *Ihar Losik*, to all it came at a considerable cost. Czechia remains gravely concerned about ongoing systemic repression in Belarus and is documented in the latest report and the 1168 political prisoners still in detention. Czechia is alarmed by the widespread use of in absentia trials, indefinite prison extensions, incommunicado detentions and other acts of ill treatment that likely amount to crimes against humanity. Czechia urges Belarus to immediately release and rehabilitate all political prisoners, including independent journalists such as *Ihar Iliyash* and *Katsyaryna Andreeva*. Arbitrary arrest and misuse of anti-extremist laws to silent dissent must end. Targeting of journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders and LGBTQI+ persons must stop. Belarus must comply with its international human rights obligation and ensure that they are treated with dignity, have access to legal counsel and medical care and are protected from torture. Lastly, Czechia would like to know from the Experts how to ensure recent goodwill gestures are sustained and what are the prospects for accountability for past crimes.

France thanks the Group of Experts for their report and notes that, after more than 5 years since the fraudulent presidential election of 9 August 2020, the human rights situation in Belarus remains worrying. According to the Special Rapporteur, in 2024, 1,724 people were convicted on political grounds. The January 2025 presidential election took place against a backdrop of brutal



repression of all political dissent. The exploitation of laws on extremism and terrorism to muzzle the opposition continues. Critical voices are targeted by intimidation measures both in Belarus and abroad. France condemns the unacceptable conditions of detention of political prisoners. In 2024 alone, dozens of cases of ill-treatment and at least two deaths in detention have been documented. France calls on the Belarusian authorities to allow detainees to communicate with their families, to provide them with immediate access to appropriate medical care and to give priority to pardoning political prisoners in poor health. France welcomes the recent release of 52 prisoners and encourages Belarus to continue along this path and to release all political prisoners. It calls once again for an end to politically motivated arrests, prosecutions and imprisonments.

Germany thanks the Group of Experts on Belarus for their work. The level of national and transnational repression against civil society, opposition, media and trade unions in and from Belarus has only worsened since the last update in March. Civil society organizations are declared extremists and their members persecuted. Political prisoners face harsh detention conditions and have limited or no access to legal representation, medical care or contact with their families. Belarusians who had to leave the country are facing *in absentia* trials and repercussions against family or friends. While welcoming the recent releases of a number of political prisoners, Germany urges the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the more than 1,100 political prisoners who still remain in custody and to refrain from merely replacing them with new arrests. Former political prisoners are never really free. Even after having been released from prison, they are either forced to leave the country, are subjected to strict state supervision or face being rearrested. In closing, Germany asks how states can further support the work of the Group of Experts in ensuring accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims in and from Belarus.

Ireland thanks the Group of Experts for their update and while acknowledging Belarus' decision to release some political prisoners this year, it believes this is not enough. Over 1,000 more continue to suffer cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and torture at the hands of Belarusian authorities. Ireland calls on Belarus to release all remaining political prisoners immediately, and condemns the repression of civil society and independent media, as well as the arbitrary detention of citizens for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and association. Ireland agrees with the Experts that President Lukashenko has methodically instrumentalized the state apparatus to retain his hold on power and that the government's brutal repression of dissenters' voices since May 2020 has been directly facilitated by the centralization of state powers in his hands. Ireland shares the Experts' concern at Belarusian citizens' inability to rely on domestic courts for accountability and notes the limitations of seeking justice at the international level. Any transition by Belarus must include the strengthening of judicial institutions, ensuring judicial independence, rule of law and accountability. In closing, Ireland would like to know what steps can the international community take to close the accountability gap for human rights violations and related crimes in Belarus.

Malta thanks Group of Experts for their work and remains deeply concerned about the persistent and systematic deterioration of the human rights situation in Belarus. The relentless repression of fundamental freedoms including freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly continues unabated. Malta strongly condemns these violations and urge the Belarusian



authorities to fully cooperate with international human rights mechanisms and to take immediate steps to restore these rights and engage in an inclusive national dialogue. Welcoming the recent release of political prisoners from arbitrary detention, Malta reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of all those who remain arbitrarily detained on political grounds without delay. Malta further calls for the end of the active involvement of Belarus in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine including its role in the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children. These actions constitute grave breaches of international law and must cease immediately. Finally, Malta urges the Belarusian authorities to abolish the death penalty and as a first step establish a moratorium.

Moldova thanks the Group of Experts on the situation of human rights in Belarus for their work and echoes the concerns of the reported deteriorating human rights situation in the country. All fundamental rights including freedom of expression, assembly and association must be guaranteed and respected. Continued oppression against civil society remains a cause of further concern. The report by the Group of Experts on alleged ill-treatment and torture of prisoners convicted on terrorism and extremism and related charges are equally disturbing. Moldova joins the Group of Experts' call for prompt, efficient and impartial investigations. While welcoming the release of several political prisoners including the 52 people released the last week, Moldova encourages further efforts to secure future releases and calls for the release of all those detained on political charges. It also launches an appeal to the Belarusian authorities to meaningfully cooperate with international and regional human rights bodies. In closing, Moldova reiterates its call on Belarus to stop any support to Russia's unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, and asks the Experts what could be done to community to do further encourage the release of individuals detained on political grounds.

New Zealand welcomes the report of the Group of Experts and reiterates its grave concern at the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus. As consistently stated, the ongoing repression of political opposition and dissent in Belarus is unacceptable. New Zealand has placed travel bans on selected individuals associated with the government of President Lukashenko following ongoing concerns about the election fraud and human rights abuses after the sham elections in August 2020 and January 2025. New Zealand notes the findings of the group of independent experts and once again urges the Belarusian government to immediately and unconditionally release all those arbitrarily detained for peacefully expressing their views or gathering in peaceful protest. While welcoming recent initiatives to release political prisoners, New Zealand urges Belarus to conduct independent, impartial and transparent investigations into all allegations of human rights violations, especially torture and other cruel and human integrating treatment. Finally, New Zealand remains deeply concerned by the continued use of the death penalty in Belarus, the only country in Europe that still actively uses capital punishment. It calls upon Belarus to heed repeated calls to abolish the death penalty, an inherently cruel and irreversible punishment.

Poland thanks the Group of Experts for their work, which enjoys its full support. The violent campaign of repression launched by the Belarusian government in the lead up to some presidential elections in 2020 continues to this day. Counterterrorism and anti-extremist legislation have been misused to persecute political opponents, civil society and the media. The country's legal profession has also been targeted. Lawyers speaking out against human rights



violations face harassment. The judiciary in Belarus is an instrument of repression issuing politically motivated verdicts in violation of third trial guarantees. Poland acknowledges the recent release of 52 prisoners as part of a deal brokered by the United States as well as the pardon of 25 individuals including political prisoners on the eve of national unity day. The accounts of torture and abuse they endured while in detention are deeply disturbing. At the same time, Poland calls on Belarus to free at least 1,100 individuals who remain arbitrarily detained. The pervasive culture of impunity for the perpetrators of the human rights violations in Belarus must end. Finally, Poland urges Belarus to end its involvement in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and cease all hybrid attacks against its neighbours including Poland

Romania remains deeply concerned about the ongoing acts of repression, intimidation, arbitrary arrests and politically motivated prosecutions targeting the media, human rights activists, lawyers and the civil society of Belarus as a whole. Romania thanks the Group for its updates and the recent comprehensive report on closing the accountability gap, highlighting the systemic issues such as corruption, clientelism, repression and a broken judicial system that prevent genuine accountability for a gross human rights violations in Belarus since May 2020 and welcomes its concrete recommendations. Romania appreciates the diplomatic efforts of all those involved in securing the release of several political prisoners in recent months and remains cautiously optimistic with regard to future developments. These developments, while important, remain insufficient. The release of some prisoners does not address the root causes of the widespread curtailment of civic and political space in Belarus and should not obscure the broader pattern of repression nor dilute the fight for accountability measures against the complete environment of impunity revolving around blatant violations of human rights. Romania reiterates its call on Belarus to immediately release all political prisoners and to stop new arrests of individuals perceived as political opponents or just representing dissenting voices. It further urges to Belarus to abide by its international obligations under international and human rights law and to cooperate with the UN mechanisms. Looking ahead, Romania asks the Experts to elaborate on developments that could be considered as signs of meaningful progress towards accountability in justice in Belarus.

Slovenia thanks the Group of Experts for their report and remains deeply concerned by the reports of widespread violence and punishments against Belarusians that may amount to gross human rights violations. Slovenia urges Belarus to respect the human rights of all its citizens and to create space for democratic dialogue, and calls upon Belarus to immediately release and fully rehabilitate all political prisoners. Their unconditional freedom, the restoration of their rights and the recognition of their dignity are vital steps towards justice and reconciliation. Slovenia further urges the Belarusian authorities to stop enabling Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine and to enable immediate return of all deported and transferred Ukrainian children in clear violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. Finally, Slovenia calls on Belarus to cooperate fully with all international mechanisms, grant access to the Group of Experts, implement their recommendations and ensure accountability. Addressing a question to the Chair of the Group, Slovenia would like to know what steps can be taken to exercise pressure for accountability to secure the release of political prisoners and to ensure immediate return of unlawfully deported children.



Switzerland thanks the Group of Experts for its update and reiterates its full support for their work. Switzerland takes note of the recent release of more than 400 arbitrarily detained persons and deplores the fact that some have had their passports withdrawn and been forced into exile. At the same time, arbitrary arrests and detentions continue. More than 1,100 people remain imprisoned in Belarus for exercising their right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Switzerland recalls that incommunicado detention and systematic convictions constitute serious human rights violations and stresses that the guarantees of a fair trial must be respected. Deplored the reported conditions of detention, including lack of access to healthcare, use of torture, sexual and gender-based violence, and arbitrary extensions of sentences, Switzerland calls on the Belarusian authorities to respect international human rights law and the absolute prohibition of torture, and to ensure that conditions of detention comply with international standards. In closing, the Swiss delegation stresses the importance of independent access for monitoring mechanisms to places of detention, as well as the communication of the place of detention and the state of health of detainees to their relatives and lawyers. Switzerland asks the Group of Experts which extrajudicial mechanisms they recommend to ensure accountability for victims of human rights violations.

Ukraine thanks the Group of Experts for their report and deems unacceptable the ongoing violence and oppression by the Belarusian authorities against their own people. Belarusians continue to face arbitrary arrests and detentions simply for exercising their fundamental freedoms of expression, opinion, assembly and association. Those responsible for gross violations enjoy impunity shielded by corruption and loyalist networks that sustain Alexander Lukashenko repressive rule. The situation is further aggravated by Belarus complicity in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Since 2022, Lukashenko has provided the Russian occupiers with the territory of Belarus and its airspace to attack our state and also continues political, military, informational and other types of support for Russia in its unprovoked and criminal war of aggression against Ukraine. The close cooperation between Moscow and Minsk poses a direct threat not only to the fundamental rights of Ukrainians but also to the security of Poland, the Baltic states and all of Europe as demonstrated by the recent incursion of Russian drones into territory of the European Union. While welcoming the recent release of 52 political prisoners facilitated through US mediation, Ukraine urges the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Belarus.

The **United Kingdom** remains gravely concerned by the human rights situation in Belarus, while welcoming the recent release of some political prisoners in Belarus. As the Group of Experts has highlighted, the regime continues to violate human rights on a systematic scale through arbitrary arrests, widespread repression and the silencing of dissent. Dissidents, civil society activists, journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers are still being prosecuted under the false pretext of combating extremism and terrorism. Despite the recent release releases, around 1,100 political prisoners remain behind bars. Many are held in isolation. Many suffer mistreatment and many are denied even basic medical care. In response, the UK has sanctioned over 200 individuals and 12 entities for their role in these abuses and for Belarus' continued support for Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. The UK will not waver in its support for Belarusian civil society and human rights defenders. To the representatives of Belarus the UK asks to release all political prisoners immediately and unconditionally; prioritize those with health conditions, disabilities,



the elderly and parents separated from their children; and ensure their rehabilitation and guarantee fair and humane treatment for all detainees.

Non-Governmental Organizations

The **Law Society of England and Wales**, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), Lawyers for Lawyers and Lawyers Rights' Watch Canada thank the Group of Experts for their update and important work. Lawyers in Belarus continue to face disbarment, arbitrary detention and prosecution simply for doing their job. Such action violates the UN basic principles on the role of lawyers. This harassment also extends beyond the border to lawyers who fled Belarus. The organizations are alarmed by the State Security Committee's decision of the 18th of August to designate the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers as an extremist formation. This carries penalties of up to ten years' imprisonment. This Association was founded by exiled lawyers and works to uphold the rights to legal defence, fair trial and the independence of the legal profession. Its designation as extremist organization is an arbitrary misuse of law that undermines fundamental freedoms. The organizations urge the UNHRC to demand an immediate withdrawal of the Association's designation as an extremist formation and an end to reprisals against Belarusian lawyers. They also call on members to raise these concerns during Belarus' upcoming Universal Periodic Review and continue supporting the Group of Experts and Special Rapporteur in their vital work.

The **National Human Rights Civic Association 'Belarusian Helsinki Committee'** once more addresses the Council for raising the plight of political prisoners. Despite recent releases, there are still more than 1100 political prisoners. They continue to suffer cruel and inhumane treatment leading to severe deterioration of health and tragically deaths in detention. At the moment, the Committee is aware of nine political prisoners who have died under such conditions. The Committee urges the authorities to release all political prisoners unconditionally. Importantly, those who are released must have a real choice about their future, whether to remain in Belarus or to leave. Forcing people into exile is a cruel practice depriving them of their dignity. Thus, the practice of releasing political prisoners must continue, but the practice of forced deportations must end. At the same time, arbitrary arrest, harassment at the border, pressure in workplaces and the persecution of civil society organizations, political parties, trade unions, religious groups and independent media must also stop. Moreover, the Committee calls for the repeal of repressive legislation introduced mainly after 2020 which legalized politically motivated persecution, including change to the criminal and administrative codes, so-called anti-extremism measures, restrictions on civil society and discriminatory provisions targeting LGBTQ+ people, workers and others. As Belarus will soon report at the UPR, the Committee hopes that member states will apply strong scrutiny and issue robust recommendations. The Committee also urges UNHCR members to keep Belarus high on their agenda and to support efforts to stop repression and ensure accountability in Belarus.

The **International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)** commends the work of the Group of Experts on Belarus and its recent report. IBAHRI reiterates its condemnation of the ongoing repression of civil society in Belarus and in particular systematic attacks and judicial harassment against lawyers representing dissenting voices defending human rights or the rule of law. IBAHRI condemns the recent KGB's designation of the Belarusian Association of Human



Rights Lawyers as an extremist formation under article 361 of the Criminal Code. These associations was founded by exiled lawyers and works to uphold the rights to defend the fair trial and the independence of the legal profession. IBAHRI calls once more for the immediate release of lawyer Maxim Znak, arbitrator detained since 2020 and held *incommunicado*. Recalling that Belarus is a state party too and therefore it is bound by the Convention Against Torture, IBAHRI deplores the full subordination of the judiciary to the executive control as well as the Minister of Justice interference in the licensing and disciplinary procedures against lawyers coupled with the Bar Association's failure to protect its members. While noting the recent release of 52 prisoners more than a thousand are still arbitrarily detained on politically motivated grounds, IBAHRI urges Belarus to immediately release all these individuals including lawyers and end the further persecution.

The **World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)** jointly with the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Human Rights Center 'Viasna' stress that the situation in Belarus has not improved. The recent politically motivated pardons of a few prisoners do not change the state organized system of persecution. Since the last dialogue in March 2025, over 300 detentions, arrests and searches have been documented, although the real figure is far higher as authorities continue to conceal massive violations amounting to crimes against humanity. Torture and ill-treatment persist, including deaths in custody. Torture and ill-treatment persist, including deaths in custody. On 8 September, another political prisoner, Andrey Padniabenny, died in prison No. 15 in Mahileu. They further highlight the continued imprisonment of human rights defenders *Ales Bialiatski*, *Valiantsin Stefanovich*, *Uladzimir Labkovich*, *Marfa Rabkova*, and *Nasta Loika*, alongside 27 media workers, 25 trade union activists, and 7 independent lawyers. Finally, they strongly support the Experts' findings on accountability gaps and urge all states to use the mechanisms outlined in this report. In its context, the organizations would welcome the Experts' views on whether state referrals of these international crimes to the ICC prosecutor could be an effective response to ongoing atrocities.

World Resisters International (WRI) together with its partner Connection e.V., thanks the Group of Independent Experts for its report which concluded that any initiative to fight impunity in Belarus is not limited to legal measure but is carried out to ensure all the basic rights of victims. Repressing laws and policies continue to target grassroots civil society organizations, human rights defenders like *Our House* and *Olga Karatch* who has already received a first sentence in absentia together with several other human rights defenders. WRI and Connection e.V. are extremely concerned by the support of the current local government to the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and the ongoing violations of the right to conscientious objection to military service and the public censorship against objectors. Many Belarusian objectors and deserters are seeking protection abroad and those who could flee the country are at risk of being deported back to Belarus where they can face criminal prosecution, torture, and long-term imprisonment. They have been reported the recent cases of *Siarhei Nikitsin*, *Mikita Svyrid*, *Raman Hladkikh*, *Illiya Hladkikh* and *Hleb Smirnou* who applied for protection in Lithuania. WRI and Connection e.V. are also alarmed by the increasing militarization of children and by their exposure to paramilitary trainings. WRI and Connection e.V. call on the Council to actively participate in the upcoming Universal Periodic Review of Belarus recommending the full implementation of the human right to conscientious objection to military service and the UN General Assembly resolution on death



penalty, repealing article 356 of the Criminal Code. WRI and Connection e.V. further call on individual member states to grant asylum to Belarusian conscientious objectors who seek protection abroad, in line with UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection .

Human Rights House Foundation congratulates the Group of Experts for their groundbreaking report, which concludes that senior state officials including the Belarusian president bear personal responsibility for directing the organized campaign of repression in Belarus and for complicity and violations that may amount to crimes against humanity. The report demonstrates how a range of state institutions from the security services and police to the judiciary and prison system have worked together to maintain this repressive system and documents the forced exile of up to 600,000 Belarusians. Despite recent releases, more than 1,000 political prisoners still remain behind bars, among them prominent human rights defenders such as *Ales Bialiatski, Uladzimir Labkovich, Valiantsin Stefanovic, Marfa Rabkova* and *Nasta Loika*. In the face of such impunity, international accountability is critical. The report maps various concrete pathways for justice at the national and international level including corporate accountability. It also stresses victims' rights to truth, remedy and reparation, underscoring important non-criminal forms of accountability that we should also be pursuing. Recent forced deportations of pardoned political prisoners further illustrate how exile is being weaponized. Given that the Rome statute recognizes deportation as a crime against humanity and that some states have asked for the ICC to examine this on jurisdictional grounds, the Foundation asks the Experts how such practices should be assessed.

The **Advocates for Human Rights** jointly with the Belarusian Coalition of Organizations, Initiatives and Activists Against Gender-Based and Domestic Violence express their appreciation to the Group of Experts for their work and latest report. They highlight the importance of addressing gender-based violence against women when undertaking measures on accountability, access to justice and effective remedies. Belarus has failed to fulfill its obligations to protect, prosecute and prevent gender-based violence throughout the years. This failure has manifested in a lack of specialized legislation and the existence of legislation that prioritizes preservation of family unity over support and safety for survivors as well as a judicial system with substantial barriers to protection, accountability and justice. Since 2020, a coordinated repression against civil society has led to the closure of approximately 2,000 NGOs including the dismantling of those running hotlines, shelters, counselling services and awareness campaigns that previously helped thousands of women. The remaining government run services often lack trained staff, confidentiality or trauma-informed care. The Advocates for Human Rights raise the necessity to call on the state of Belarus to adopt comprehensive legislation to address gender-based violence against women, especially concerning domestic violence as well as continuing to recommend cessation of repression of civil society and specialized NGOs including the dismissal of all charges, the closure of criminal cases and allowing them to resume their operations without fear of reprisal.

Article 19 - The International Centre Against Censorship and Human Constanta thank the Group of Experts for their oral update, and welcome the opportunity to continue to support their vital work. The organizations' recent report [*Quashing Online Dissent*](#) highlights how the Belarusian authorities continue to brand almost any dissent as 'extremism' through overbroad and vague legislation. Imprecision is the authoritarians' power – the broader and vaguer the term,



the easier it is to convert a meme, a donation, or a simple ‘like’ into a crime. The definitions are stretched, redrafted, and even applied retroactively, so yesterday’s lawful post can become today’s crime. The cost of this crackdown is measured in lives, with scores of human rights defenders and other civil society actors deemed to be ‘extremists’ dying in detention. While over 300 political prisoners have been released in several waves of pardons, over 1000 remain behind bars for exercising their rights. The testimonies and physical condition of those recently freed reveal the inhumane and degrading treatment endured in detention. *Nasta Loika*, a prominent human rights defender, continues to serve a seven-year prison sentence under one of the most notorious ‘extremist’ articles. Nasta was forced to appear in a so-called ‘confession video’, spread on pro-government channels, exacerbating its humiliating effects through online circulation. She has been subject to torture and last month she was moved to confinement in a four-square meter unheated bare cell. Currently on a so-called ‘terrorist list’, all monetary transfers to her are now qualified as ‘terrorism financing’. Her lawyers have been intimidated, disbarred, and persecuted. As Belarusian authorities intensify their crackdown, they are fostering fear and isolation and dismantling social bonds that sustain civic resistance and democracy, further entrenching authoritarian rule. The two organizations urge states to intensify their demands that Belarus comply with its international human rights obligations, including to explicitly call for the immediate release of *Nasta Loika* and all other prisoners sentenced on politically-motivated grounds, as well as to explore additional avenues for accountability. They once again express their full support to the Group of Experts and encourage them to continue their great work monitoring and reporting on developments related to anti-extremism.

The **International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)** reiterates its condemnation of the ongoing repression of civil society and erosion of the independence of the legal profession in Belarus, in particular the continual reprisals against lawyers and human rights defenders. The ICJ supports the findings of the group of independent experts, including its assessment of Belarus’ persistent failure to assure the right to fair trials and access to justice. Lawyers have faced harassment, arbitrary detention, spurious prosecutions, criminal sanctions, and unjustified revocation of their license in retaliation for the legitimate professional work and public statements. The Belarusian Bar Association is not independent and its disciplinary bodies are misused as tools to suppress lawyers’ independent work. Some have been disbarred, criminally prosecuted or forced into exile, leaving many detainees without access to legal defence. Last month, the Independent Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers was declared by the authorities on extremist formation, exposing its members to possible prison sentences of up to 10 years. The ICJ deplores Belarus’ continuous practice of torture and ill-treatment, a large number of political prisoners and the use and expansion of the death penalty. The ICJ calls on all states to cooperate with the Group of Independent Experts and other relevant UN mechanisms. It urges the Belarusian authorities to immediately release all individuals arbitrarily detained for political reasons, including lawyers and end the further persecution.

Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI) states that the release of 52 political prisoners which the Chair of the Group of Experts mentioned must be seen in the context of a rising total of political prisoners with over 70 new imprisonments in August alone. It has been alleged that the latest arrests included many charged for participation in the original 2020 demonstrations. The latest facial recognition systems and metadata from mobile phones are being used in the service



of a very old fashioned repressive authoritarian regime including to identify Belarusians returning from abroad from photographs or videos of past protests and to prosecute them in violation of their freedom of assembly. As the evidence Ms. Karinna MOSKALENKO quoted shows such persons have no hope of a fair trial, face imprisonment in cruel, inhuman or degrading conditions and risk torture. On 3 September, *Andrei Padniabenny* died in detention bringing to 9 the number of deaths of political prisoners since 2020. States can do very little to influence Belarus to mend its ways but they can take action to protect those fleeing from Belarus. CPTI encourages all states but in particular Lithuania which receives most Belarusian refugees and which in its statement today so eloquently described the repression to refrain from *refoulement*.

FACTS & FIGURES ON ID PARTICIPATION

3 Regional and Cross-Regional Groups

17 State Delegations

10 Non-Governmental Organizations