

## **Joint statement at the 1422<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**

*Delivered by Ambassador Christian Grønbech-Jensen,  
Permanent Representative of Denmark to the OSCE,*

*On the Report by the Rapporteur under the OSCE Moscow Mechanism on the serious threat to the OSCE human dimension in Belarus since 5 November 2020*

Mr. Chair,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the following 38 delegations who on 23 March 2023 invoked the Moscow Mechanism as a response to the alarming human rights situation in Belarus: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

On behalf of the invoking States, I wish to thank Professor Hervé Ascensio for his work as Rapporteur under the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism. We are most grateful for your professional and independent approach to your mandate and for the thorough and well-documented report that you have produced. We regret that the Belarusian authorities refused to cooperate. The fact that you were met by victims of repression who seemingly had lost faith in positive changes, and who reported that fellow victims were terrified and intimidated from providing evidence, is a stark reminder of the severity of the situation.

I sincerely hope that all 57 OSCE participating States will do justice to your report by considering carefully your findings and recommendations, which are addressed, not only to Belarus, but also to OSCE participating States and the wider International Community.

Mr. Chair,

We invoked the Moscow Mechanism to underscore our concerns about the continued deterioration of the internal human rights situation in Belarus and to explore the more recent development of serious abuses linked to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

For more than two years, we have continuously called upon the Belarusian authorities to put an end to repression and violence. To protect the victims and to ensure the safety of all individuals, without discrimination. To address the recommendations of the 2020 Moscow Mechanism Report. To live up to OSCE and other international commitments and principles. To abide by international law. And to end impunity for human rights violations. But the delegation of Belarus and the Belarusian authorities have – again and again – ignored our legitimate concerns and requests.

The independent report by Professor Ascensio has fully confirmed how Belarusian authorities are continuing their brutal and unprecedented crackdown on opposing voices. The report concludes that *“so far, the Government of Belarus has not taken any steps to put an end to this situation, nor to provide effective remedies for the victims. On the contrary, the repressive policy has been steadily increasing over the past two years”*.

Legislative amendments have been introduced with the aim of providing the Belarusian authorities with *“a full arsenal of legislation designed to hinder any form of opposition”*. These amendments include the extension of the death penalty, increased liability for vaguely defined acts, restriction of political rights for Belarusians in exile, and limitations to the freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Moreover, the report clearly confirms how, after the outbreak of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, repression has been *“particularly directed at those expressing their opposition to the war or their support for the Ukrainian people”*. Once again, we see how internal repression is linked to external aggression.

Mr. Chair,

The number of political prisoners in Belarus now exceeds 1,486 with activists arguing the real number could be significantly higher. For almost three years, peaceful protesters have been met with brutal force from Belarusian authorities. People have been arbitrarily arrested and detained on politically motivated charges. People have been deprived of their right to a fair trial. Lawyers have been intimidated to stay away from defending those charged on political grounds. At least 100,000 Belarusians have been, and continue to be, forced to flee the country – to leave their homes. And

independent media, journalists, and other media workers have been under sustained attack.

The report confirms the excessive violence used by the Belarusian authorities to carry out the repression. The Mission found that *"torture or inhuman or degrading treatment are occurring on a regular and organised basis in places of detention and are particularly targeted at those perceived as political opponents"*. Further, the report gives evidence of the practice of mass arrests in people's homes and the use of violence to gain access to personal data, which is later used against individuals.

Meanwhile, Belarusian authorities continue to enjoy impunity.

Mr. Chair,

The UN OHCHR in its latest report on the human rights situation in Belarus presented to the UN Human Rights Council on 22 March concluded that some of the violations committed in Belarus may amount to crimes against humanity.

We appreciate the efforts of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB) and other international investigative mechanisms, including under the UN OHCHR, to collect and preserve evidence of the human rights violations in Belarus. Impunity is not an option.

Mr. Chair,

The first steps toward security and stability for the people of Belarus remains for the Belarusian authorities to release all those unjustly imprisoned, to end the campaign of violence against peaceful protesters, and to hold perpetrators to account.

As the report concludes, *"without accountability and justice [in Belarus], there can be no security and stability in the long run on the European Continent"*.

Against this background, and based on the recommendations in Professor Ascencio's report, we ask the Belarus delegation:

- When will the Belarusian authorities cease their brutal repression and release and rehabilitate all political prisoners?

- When will the Belarusian authorities bring criminal charges against those responsible for human rights violations and abuses, including Belarusian security officials?
- When will the Belarusian authorities ensure respect for the Belarusian constitution according to which “(t)he republic of Belarus shall exclude acts of military aggression against other states from its territory”?

Mr. Chair,

We thank Professor Ascensio again for the thorough report, and we remain committed to ensuring that the report – and its recommendations – are followed up.

Thank you.