



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Anniversary of the Fraudulent Election in Belarus

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Katherine Brucker
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 8, 2023

Three years ago on August 9, people in Belarus went to the polls to exercise their right to vote in the presidential election. In the face of strong popular support for opposition candidates, Alyaksandr Lukashenka falsified the voting results and stole the election to ensconce himself for a sixth term in office, completely ignoring the will of the people. Since then, Belarusian authorities have done their utmost to destroy the resulting country-wide pro-democracy movement. They have resorted to violence and repression to silence dissenting voices, including from civil society, independent media, the political opposition, and everyday Belarusian citizens.

Thus, 2020 presidential candidates Syarhey Tsikhanouski and Viktor Babaryka are serving sentences of 18 and 14 years in prison, respectively, for attempting to provide alternative choices of leadership to the Belarusian people. Activists Maria Kalesnikava and Maksim Znak are serving sentences of 11 and 10 years in prison, respectively, for opposing the post-election waves of political repression. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski is serving ten years in prison for defending the rights of his fellow citizens through his work with the Viasna Human Rights Center.

As of September 5, Viasna counts 1,502 political prisoners in Belarus – with 17 of the names added to the list on August 29, and ten more added on September 1. Among these is journalist Larysa Shchyryakova, who a court in Homel sentenced to 3.5 years in prison on August 31. She was found guilty of “facilitating extremist activities,” and “seeking to destabilize the situation in the country,” simply for doing her job reporting on the repression following the 2020 presidential election. Authorities took her minor son when they arrested her in December 2022, placing him in an orphanage before transferring custody to her ex-husband.

Larysa is just one of dozens of independent journalists and bloggers targeted for their valiant efforts to keep the world apprised of the Lukashenka regime’s brutality. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty consultant Ihar Losik continues to serve a fifteen-year sentence on politically motivated charges; a court sentenced his wife, Darya to two years in prison in January for an interview she did with independent media in which she spoke about her husband’s “unjust detention and poor prison conditions.” Their young daughter is now growing up without her parents.

In response to the increasing political repression and systemic human rights violations in Belarus, and the Lukashenka regime’s support for Russia’s war against Ukraine, the United States has worked closely with our Allies and partners to hold the Lukashenka regime to account. In March, we joined 37 other participating States in invoking the Moscow

Mechanism for a second time to examine Belarus's continuing failure to abide by its OSCE human dimension commitments.

We call on the Belarusian authorities to implement the report's recommendations, including (but not limited to):

- Releasing political prisoners;
- Ensuring decent conditions in places of detention, including access to necessary medical care and visits from attorneys and family members;
- Bringing criminal and administrative codes into full compliance with international obligations and commitments;
- Suspending legislation and amendments to the criminal code intended to target pro-democracy activists and those opposed to Russia's war in Ukraine - including expanding the use of the death penalty - for exercising their human rights;
- Respecting the right to a fair trial;
- Allowing international expert missions to Belarusian territory, including to visit places of detention and invite OSCE/ODIHR to the upcoming 2024 local and parliamentary elections;
- Repealing laws targeting independent organizations and media for political purposes; and
- Holding human rights abusers to account.

Separately, the United States has imposed sanctions and visa restrictions on hundreds of individuals and entities for enabling the Lukashenka regime's domestic repression and facilitating Russia's war against Ukraine. In August, we designated eight individuals and five entities, including key state-owned enterprises and government officials, to impede their ability to generate revenue for the regime and evade sanctions. Among those designated is the Department of Financial Investigations of the State Control Committee of the Republic of Belarus, which has waged a relentless assault on Belarusian independent media by launching probes against online news outlets and raiding the homes and offices of journalists.

Just last month, the United States imposed new visa restrictions on 101 regime officials and their affiliates for their actions to undermine the Belarusian people's aspirations for democracy in Belarus. This includes judges responsible for issuing politically motivated sentences against Belarusians for exercising their human rights.

Three years after the fraudulent presidential election that inspired so many Belarusians to take to the streets and demand a democratically elected government that respects their human rights, the United States continues to stand with the brave people of Belarus and to support their demand to hold the Lukashenka regime to account.

It is a testament to the strength, bravery, and resilience of the Belarusian people that they refuse to be muzzled and continue to call – often at great risk to their own safety and that of their families – for a democratic government that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms.

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