

17 June 2021

To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the UN Human Rights Council:

Excellency,

The Human Rights Council at its 47th session will consider the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus. As Belarus's human rights crisis deepens, the mandate is more important than ever. We, the undersigned international and Belarusian organisations, urge your delegation to support the renewal of the mandate while maintaining scrutiny on Belarus's human rights crisis.

The human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate. Recent alarming developments include:

- The 23 May interception and forced landing of Ryanair flight 4978 as a result of a false bomb alert in order to arrest a Belarusian activist and journalist-in-exile Raman Pratasevich. There has been a significant international outcry over these actions, including from the [UN High Commissioner](#);
- The crackdown on the major independent news website Tut.by and criminal prosecution of its management and employees. Although the formal charges are related to economic activities of the media outlet and its partner companies, the timing and the manner of the attack make apparent its real objective: to intimidate journalists and to silence independent voices in Belarus. These developments were noted in [a joint statement](#) by five Special Rapporteurs;
- On 24 May, Belarus enacted, without public consultation, amendments to three important pieces of legislation to further eviscerate freedoms of expression and assembly. These laws place new restrictions on media freedom and on peaceful assemblies, increasing and toughening criminal penalties, expanding the definition of extremist activity and allowing the misuse of investigative measures under the pretext of "combating extremism" as well as further measures to undermine the independence of lawyers and the bar association. The government has also announced new legislation on political parties and on public associations, which could require the re-registration of civil society organisations, and threatens their further delegitimization and their vulnerability to persecution;
- The continued deterioration of the situation for victims of politically-motivated prosecution, including with regard to detention conditions, humane treatment, and access to medical care, as tragically illustrated by the 21 May death in prison of political prisoner Vitold Ashurak.¹

At the 46th session, the Human Rights Council created a new accountability mandate. The new mandate, once operational, will have a very specific and narrow focus, namely to document the human rights violations committed in Belarus since 1 May 2020, and particularly the most serious violations, with a view towards accountability. On the other hand, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur² has a distinctive, complementary, and broader role, which will remain essential alongside the work of the accountability mandate. The mandate's responsibilities, include:

- Monitoring the situation of human rights in Belarus and making recommendations for the improvement of the human rights situation. This includes documenting and analysing long-term trends, and addressing human rights issues outside the scope of the accountability

¹ "Shocking Video Of Death Of Activist Vitold Ashurak In Belarusian Colony"
<https://charter97.org/en/news/2021/5/25/423632/>

² As identified in A/HRC/RES/20/13

mandate, including those not connected to the Presidential election and prior to 1 May 2020, and various kinds of thematic violations, including forms of discrimination;

- Supporting the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the High Commissioner to the Human Rights Council in June 2012³;
- Providing an open offer of assistance to the Government of Belarus in fulfilling its human rights obligations, even if that assistance is not accepted; and,
- Offering support and advice to civil society, which is particularly important in the absence of domestic or regional remedies for human rights violations. It is worth highlighting that the Special Rapporteur remains essential for Belarusian civil society.

Human rights defenders face ongoing repression and reprisals for cooperating with the United Nations. Special Procedures - and the Special Rapporteur in particular - should remain an accessible and safe channel for Belarusian civil society to deliver diverse and up-to-date information from within the country.

Given the current dire human rights situation in Belarus, and the ongoing importance and unique nature of the Special Rapporteur's mandate, we therefore recommend that you renew the Special Rapporteur's mandate at HRC47, and ensure her office is sufficiently resourced and funded. We also encourage your further support for the High Commissioner's office as it seeks to operationalise the accountability mandate.

Do not hesitate to contact us if you would like further information.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration,

- Amnesty International
- ARTICLE 19
- Assembly of pro-democratic NGOs of Belarus
- Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House
- Center for Civil Liberties
- Civic Assistance Committee
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- Civil Rights Defenders
- Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor
- Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights
- Human Rights Center "Memorial"
- Human Rights Center "Viasna"
- Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan
- Human Rights House Foundation
- Human Rights in Mental Health-FGIP
- Human Rights Monitoring Institute
- Human Rights Watch
- Hungarian Helsinki Committee
- International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
- International Centre for Civil Initiatives "Our House"
- International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
- Law Society of England and Wales

³ A/HRC/20/8

- Lawyers for Lawyers
- Legal Initiative
- Libereco Partnership for Human Rights
- Netherlands Helsinki Committee
- Norwegian Helsinki Committee
- People in Need
- Public Verdict Foundation
- RAZAM.CH
- World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)