



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
17 November 2023

English only

---

## Human Rights Council

Fifty-third session

19 June–14 July 2023

Agenda item 4

**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

### **Written statement\* submitted by National Human Rights Civic Association “Belarusian Helsinki Committee”, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2023]

---

\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Deteriorating Human Rights Situation in Belarus: Three Years After Elections**

The human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate [1]. The systemic repressive campaign initiated by the authorities targets individuals who simply sought fair and transparent elections, cessation of police violence, and the protection of human rights and freedoms. Daily reports pour in, documenting the arbitrary detention of the participants of the peaceful protests of 2020-2022; imprisonment of individuals for expressing their opinions online; branding of independent media and civil society organizations as extremist formations; and denial of essential medical treatment to political prisoners, resulting in deteriorating health conditions [2][3]. The Russian Federation's aggressive war against Ukraine, accompanied by Belarus' complicity, has unleashed a new wave of civil disagreement. Tragically, this has resulted in an escalation of suppressive measures against individuals who participated in anti-war demonstrations or dared to voice dissent towards the war through other means [4].

Despite the fact that at least 360 political prisoners have fully served their sentences and have been released, presently, the number of political prisoners in Belarus surpasses 1,500, with this figure constantly on the rise [5]. Among them, 7 human rights defenders imprisoned solely for their peaceful advocacy for human rights, approximately 40 representatives of independent trade unions, 33 media professionals who faced persecution for their commitment to truth-telling, and 10 lawyers targeted for faithfully carrying out their professional responsibilities. Political prisoners endure insufferable detention conditions, torture, inhumane and degrading treatment, including, but not limited to, the denial of medical care, solitary confinement, and obstruction of correspondence [6]. We emphasize with sorrow that today we are aware of two cases of tragic deaths among political prisoners, which are direct consequences of such maltreatment [7][8].

In addition, we are witnessing the complete dismantling of civil society within Belarus. Over 1,300 organizations, including those dedicated to human rights protection, advocacy for vulnerable groups, and environmental protection, were forcibly liquidated or forced to make a decision on self-liquidation [9]. Moreover, civil society organizations, known for their invaluable contributions to the betterment of society, find themselves unjustly recognized as extremist formations through the arbitrary application of already ambiguous legislation aimed at combating extremism. Among those unfairly targeted are notable organizations such as "Ecohome", which is engaged in environmental protection, the Belarusian Radio and Electronic Industry Workers' Union (REP), and the Belarusian Association of Journalists, a longstanding defender of human rights. This decision carries grave repercussions not only for the organizations and their dedicated members but also for anyone who simply seeks to engage with them. Presently, any form of collaboration with these organizations could be qualified as aiding extremist activities, leading to criminal responsibility. In addition, in 2022, Article 193-1 was returned to the Criminal Code, which provides for up to 2 years of imprisonment for the organization of activities or participation in the activities of unregistered or liquidated civil society organizations [10]. At least two criminal cases, initiated under this Article, were documented in 2022.

The absence of civil society organizations, their representatives, lawyers, and journalists renders society even more defenseless and vulnerable to abuses. Far-reaching implications thereof hinder social progress, impede economic development, and jeopardize the overall well-being of the Belarusian people.

Belarusian legislation, at the same time, is increasingly toughening up, strengthening the atmosphere of fear and insecurity in Belarusian society. We draw attention to the constant expansion of the scope of application of the death penalty, which can now be imposed for "attempted terrorism" and high treason committed by a state official or a person with the status of member of the armed forces, in clear violation of Article 6 of the ICCPR [10].

In 2022, Belarus withdrew from the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, renouncing the procedure for individual complaints to the UN Human Rights Committee [11]. This regrettable decision deprived victims of human rights violations of one of the few avenues to appeal against the actions of the authorities at the international level.

Given the circumstances, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Belarus assumes utmost significance as a vital instrument for assessing the overall human rights situation in Belarus. It serves as a mechanism to respond to the ever-evolving situation of the rule of law default and systemic human rights violations. Furthermore, it plays a crucial role in ensuring that the situation of human rights in Belarus remains in focus on the international arena.

We extend our profound gratitude to Ms. Anaïs Marin, whose dedication and diligent work in addressing the human rights situation in Belarus have been truly commendable. Ms. Marin's prompt responses to emerging challenges and her consistent collaboration with various stakeholders have provided a crucial platform for amplifying the voices of those who have been silenced and marginalized. We deeply appreciate her tireless efforts to document and expose human rights violations, ensuring that the international community remains well-informed and actively engaged in addressing the ongoing crisis in Belarus.

Given the gravity of the situation, we call on the Human Rights Council to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Belarus, reinforcing the commitment of the international community to address the ongoing crisis. We also call on the Human Rights Council to provide sufficient financial resources to support the continued efforts of the Special Rapporteur who operates under challenging circumstances due to the current closure of Belarus, necessitating visits to various countries where stakeholders including Belarusians forced to flee their country are situated.

In addition to the Human Rights Council's action, we appeal to all member states to maintain their support and engagement with Belarusian citizens, civil society and democratic forces. This collective effort is not only essential for the fate of the nation, but also holds significant regional implications. By consistently acting for Belarus, member states send a resolute message that human rights violations and disregard for fundamental freedoms will not be tolerated. It is through unified and concerted action that meaningful change can be achieved, restoring the rule of law, justice, and respect for human rights in Belarus.

- 
- Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House, Belarusian Association of Journalists, Human Constanta, Human Rights Center “Viasna”, Human Rights Organization Lawtrend, Legal Initiative, PEN Belarus, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.
- [1] Belarusian Helsinki Committee, National Human Rights Index: <https://index.belhelcom.org/en/>
- [2] Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath, A/HRC/52/68: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G23/008/97/PDF/G2300897.pdf?OpenElement>
- [3] Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Anaïs Marin, A/HRC/50/58: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/332/24/PDF/G2233224.pdf?OpenElement>
- [4] Human Rights Center “Viasna”, Human Rights Situation in Belarus in 2022, Analytical review: [https://spring96.org/files/misc/annual\\_review\\_2022\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://spring96.org/files/misc/annual_review_2022_final_en.pdf)
- [5] Human Rights Center “Viasna”, List of political prisoners: <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>
- [6] OSCE fact-finding mission on Belarus (2023), Report on the serious threat to the OSCE human dimension in Belarus since 5 November 2020: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/5/543240.pdf>
- [7] Human Rights Center “Viasna”, List of political prisoners, Vitold Ashurak: <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/vitold-ashurak>
- [8] Joint statement of the human rights community concerning the death of political prisoner Mikhail Klimovich: <https://belhelcom.org/en/news/we-demand-investigate-klimovichs-death-and-lack-proper-medical-care-colonies>
- [9] Human Rights Organization Lawtrend, Monitoring of NGOs in Belarus that are in the process of forced liquidation and have decided to self-liquidate: <https://www.lawtrend.org/liquidation-nko>
- [10] Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus: <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=hk9900275>
- [11] The Law “On Denunciation by the Republic of Belarus of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”, 27 October 2022, No. 217-Z: <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12200217&p1=1>