

**Joint Statement on behalf of the co-chairs of the United Nations Group of Friends
for the Protection of Journalists on the situation in Belarus**

**September 28, 2020
New York**

The co-chairs of the United Nations Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists - Lithuania, France and Greece - and the undersigned Members of the Group of Friends and the UN Member States, express their profound concern over the deteriorating situation of human rights in Belarus, including multiple reports of harassment, arbitrary arrests, intensifying persecution and detention of journalists and media workers, as well as the human rights defenders and other members of the Belarusian civil society.

We are particularly concerned about the reports of the apparent specific targeting of both local and international journalists for violence, beatings, use of rubber bullets and detention, amid hundreds of people reported missing, and the use of internet jamming to hinder the ability of the Belarusian people to access and share information. This is compounding in an atmosphere of fear among the people of Belarus, and journalists in particular, as some of them reportedly no longer feel safe to wear their identification vests while reporting on protests, out of fear of persecution from the authorities.

International non-governmental organizations have recorded more than 200 serious violations of journalists' rights since the beginning of the electoral campaign in Belarus, and arrests and detentions of journalists and media workers increase at an alarming rate to this day. A number of international journalists working for foreign media were recently stripped of their accreditation, as public access to more than 70 websites was blocked since August 21 and several independent newspapers were denied print and distribution.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms this apparent stifling of the freedom of opinion and expression and of independent journalism, as well as all attacks against press freedom in Belarus. We call on the Belarusian authorities to immediately end their assault on journalists and media workers, release those unjustly detained, and account for those reported missing. Reiterating the calls of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Procedures mandate

holders, we urge the immediate release of all persons detained arbitrarily, independent investigations into all allegations of human rights violations and abuses, access to justice and redress for victims.

We encourage the Belarusian authorities to allow journalists to continue doing their jobs, as it is vital for the people of Belarus to have access to impartial, independent information about events in their country. In this light, we call on the Belarusian authorities to reinstate the credentials of local and international journalists and allow them to continue reporting the facts.

We urge the Belarusian authorities to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, including by allowing her access to visit the country and to meet freely with relevant stakeholders, journalists, media workers and civil society, in order to assess the situation and assist the government in fulfilling its international human rights obligations by considering the implementation of her recommendations.

Only press freedom and free access to information will make it possible to verify and witness current events in Belarus. Only free, open and independent media that report in the public interest and hold power to account, as well as public access to free and impartial information, can secure democratic processes and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly the rights to freedom of expression and opinion and freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Signed,

Co-chairs of the UN Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists, Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives of Lithuania, France and Greece

Annex:

Co-signatories (in alphabetical order):

Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Micronesia, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.