

Joint Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus

The following is a joint statement on behalf of Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Marshall Islands, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, the United States of America and the European Union.

We support the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people to choose their own path through free and fair elections; we are inspired by the people's commitment to determine their own future, free from external intervention or threats, and in full respect of Belarus's sovereignty. The 9 August 2020 presidential election was neither free nor fair. It was marred by the arrest of prominent opposition candidates, severe election irregularities, including restricted ballot access for the opposition; the absence of international observers; arrests, detentions, and intimidation of presidential candidates other than Mr. Lukashenko; credible reports of widespread torture and ill treatment of detained peaceful protesters; and internet blockages

We strongly condemn the ongoing post-election crackdown carried out by Belarusian authorities against peaceful protesters, including participants in the weekly women's marches, human rights defenders, members of labor unions and strike committees, prominent athletes, journalists and other media workers, and opposition members. This has amounted to the detention of thousands of innocent people; the hospitalization of hundreds; and several reported deaths. We recognize the important role of women human rights defenders in the protests and are deeply concerned about reports of violence against both women and men in Belarus in the context of the Presidential election, including sexual abuse and rape.

We urge Belarus authorities not to use purported national security concerns as a pretext to deny individuals their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedoms of expression and association and the right to peaceful assembly.

We are also alarmed by reports, including from the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Procedure Mandate Holders of the Human Rights Council about more than 500 cases of torture and other severe abuses, including sexual violence in the post-election period. There are a number of arrested or detained individuals who remain unaccounted for. The violence must stop, and those responsible for human rights violations and abuses must be held to account. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners and all those arbitrarily detained, for authorities to cease any violence and repression directed against peaceful demonstrators, to end abuses against persons engaged in the pro-democracy movement, and provide an accounting of those who are missing.

We are especially concerned about credible reports of politically motivated detentions, including, but not limited to, members of the pro-democracy Coordination Council. The abductions, arrests, detentions, forced exiles of the Council's members

are unacceptable, including criminal charges brought against Presidium members Mariya Kalesnikava, Maxim Znak, and Liliya Ulasova. We urge authorities to immediately cease their intimidation of opposition leaders, journalists, human rights defenders, and protesters.

We are extremely concerned about reports of harassment and detention of journalists and media workers by Belarusian authorities as well as reported violations of freedom of expression. We further condemn the ongoing targeted content blocking and internet shutdowns by the Belarusian authorities, which erodes civic space and unduly limits the exercise of human rights, including those of peaceful assembly, and freedoms of association and expression. The increasing restrictions on independent media actors in Belarus, including the recent targeting of Tut.by, Belarus' largest independent media outlet, must stop.

We welcome the Human Rights Council's resolution on the human rights situation in Belarus in the run up to the 2020 Presidential election and its aftermath, adopted subsequent to the urgent debate held in the Council on September 18. To prevent any further escalation of violence we believe that that continued scrutiny of the international community is necessary.

For the sake of Belarus' future, we urge the Belarusian authorities to open a peaceful, inclusive, and constructive dialogue with opposition leaders and Belarusian civil society in a way that respects the aspirations of the Belarusian people, and fully cooperate with the OSCE Moscow Mechanism fact-finding mission looking into credible reports of human rights violations and abuses.

The Belarusian people have spoken and we support them in their calls for unrestricted dialogue, free and fair elections, accountability for human rights violations and abuses and the release of all those arbitrarily detained.