



PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT

by

H. E. Mr. Ivan KORČOK

**Minister of Foreign and European Affairs
of the Slovak Republic**

at the

***Arria-Formula Meeting of the United Nations Security Council
on
Media Freedom in Belarus***

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-Check against delivery-

Mr. Chair, Dear Urmas,

Four months since your previous Arria-formula meeting on human rights in Belarus, we meet again as the situation in the country remains dire. We are grateful to Estonia and other co-sponsors for organizing this important debate. We all agree that this issue must remain on our radar. And, here, I want to be very clear – **this is about fundamental principles of democracy and respect of human rights, including the freedom of media.**

In the aftermath of the fraudulent presidential elections, the safety of journalists and the freedom of the media in Belarus have been under massive attack. We are deeply concerned about the increase of regime's brutality. Media representatives continue to face detentions, ill-treatment, torture, enforced disappearances and other forms of oppression. Journalists are prosecuted on baseless grounds and internet freedoms have been further restricted. **All of this makes Belarus the most dangerous country for journalists in Europe, as reported by *Reporters Without Borders*.**

Slovakia is a member of the Media Freedom Coalition and we have joined the Statement of the *UN Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists* urging Belarus not to use national security concerns as a pretext to deny individuals their human rights. Following the August 2020 presidential elections, **we have also strengthened our support of the civil society in Belarus**, both financially and non-financially. Significant portion of the initiatives Slovakia has sponsored are aimed at empowering independent media and journalists.

Mr. Chair,

As Slovakia has repeatedly stated, the international community cannot stay silent when human rights are severely violated. Our joint effort and engagement in a concerted way is more than needed now.

I repeat my **call on Belarus** to launch an open and inclusive dialogue, re-establish justice, democracy and rule of law in close cooperation with the civil society, international community and under the usual scrutiny of the media. Furthermore, Belarus must create free, safe and enabling environment for journalists and media workers, and ensure that they can do their work without facing intimidation or harassment.

Mr. Chair,

Let me conclude by reiterating that Slovakia stands ready to assist Belarus in seeking a peaceful and democratic solution to the current crisis, and we fully support all UN-led efforts in achieving this goal.

Thank you.