



Delegation of Canada  
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada  
auprès de l'OSCE

**JOINT STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOCELYN KINNEAR  
ON “FOLLOW UP ON THE JULY 11th INVOCATION OF THE VIENNA  
MECHANISM”**

**1484<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

**25 July 2024**

Madam Chair,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the following participating States, who are members of the informal Group of Friends of Democratic Belarus: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, and my own country, Canada.

The following participating States are also joining this statement: Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, Moldova, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Switzerland and Ukraine.

On July 11th, this group of participating States invoked the Vienna Mechanism and conveyed a letter to Belarus posing eleven questions regarding the conditions of detention of prisoners, and reprisals against their family members. As of today, Belarus has failed to respond to these questions.

In the letter, we referenced the findings of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Expert Mission Report, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, as well as reporting from leading civil society groups. Despite repeated denials by Belarus, there is ever-increasing evidence of the use of arrest, prosecution and detention as instruments of repression, and of the systematic mistreatment and abuse of political prisoners.

At the recent 56th session of the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Ms. Anaïs Marin, described ongoing deterioration, with repressive measures being used to target Belarusian citizens inside and outside the country.

The Special Rapporteur expressed particular concern about the ill-treatment of individuals convicted on politically motivated charges. Based on corroborated witness accounts, she reported that political prisoners faced harsher treatment, were frequently subjected to solitary confinement and incommunicado detention, and prohibited from receiving correspondence, packages, and medicine. She expressed acute concern that deliberately imposed malnutrition and ill-treatment, and inappropriate or untimely health care were negatively affecting the health of many of these individuals, including cases leading to hospitalizations and even deaths.

On July 2nd, Ms. Marin and seven other UN special rapporteurs, as well as the Working Groups on Arbitrary Detention, on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances AND on Discrimination against Women and Girls issued a letter urging Belarusian authorities to pardon all imprisoned older persons jailed on political charges who were excluded from the July 2024 amnesty law. They noted that most of them are serving prison sentences of up to 25 years, some are detained in pretrial detention, and some have been subjected to compulsory psychiatric care. Several detainees suffer chronic diseases, acute or grave illnesses, and some are persons with disabilities.

Madam Chair,

July 14th marked the third anniversary of the detention of Ales Bialiatski, chairman of Viasna Human Rights Center, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, and winner of the Democracy Defender Initiative Award. We have heard disturbing reports about his treatment including that he has been subject to solitary confinement, that he does not receive correspondence from relatives and friends, and that he has been denied access to necessary medications and medical treatment.

Mr. Bialiatski's detention is tragically symbolic. His organization – Viasna – continues to document the status of over 1400 political prisoners currently held by Belarusian authorities. These 1400 individuals, in turn, are only a fraction of the thousands of individuals who have been in and out of detention since 2020 for daring to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.

The response of the Belarusian authorities in this Council is only denial and obfuscation and cynical claims to “non-interference in internal affairs.”

We remind Belarus that they have a binding obligation under international law, articulated in Article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to ensure that all persons in Belarus that are deprived of their liberty “shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.”

We take note of the recent release of several political prisoners. Regrettably, however, this is only a fraction of the individuals at risk.

In their “Shadow Report” on the implementation of the Moscow Mechanism report recommendations, the Coalition of Belarusian Human Rights Organizations reported that there are at least 252 political prisoners who face significant risks of mistreatment while incarcerated, including vulnerable individuals such as those with disabilities, serious health conditions, seniors, and minors.

On July 12th , over 50 Nobel Laureates from across the globe - authors, activists, journalists, physicians and scientists – released a joint appeal urging “Lukashenko to show humanity and compassion by freeing all citizens recognized by human rights defenders as political prisoners.”

In this regard, we reiterate the questions posed in our letter of July 11th.

We call on Belarusian authorities to immediately release on humanitarian grounds all political prisoners facing serious health issues or chronic conditions. We further call for the unconditional release of all 1400+ political prisoners held in Belarus and for an end to the harassment and targeting of their families.

Finally, we call on all OSCE participating States to ensure that extradition of Belarusian citizens to Belarus complies with international law, recognising that Belarusian human rights defenders, media workers and those in political opposition can face particular risks in Belarus.

Thank you, Madam Chair.