



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Belarus Sanctions

As delivered by Charge d'Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 3, 2011

The United States would like to call attention to the statement made by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Philip Crowley, distributed as SEC.DEL/46/11 on February 1, 2011. This statement outlines measures taken by the U.S. Government in response to the brutal crackdown by President Lukashenka and the Government of Belarus in the wake of the presidential election of December 19, 2010.

Assistant Secretary Crowley's statement notes that the inappropriate use of force and the detention of hundreds of demonstrators; the charging of five opposition presidential candidates with organizing and participating in mass disturbances; the ongoing raids against civil society, independent media, and opposition political parties; the closure of the OSCE office in Minsk; and the flawed vote count all represent major steps backward for the country.

The United States continues to seek the immediate release of all detainees and the dismissal of all charges associated with the crackdown; a halt to the harassment of civil society, independent media, and the political opposition; and the opening of space for the free expression of political views, the development of a civil society, and freedom of the media. We will review and adjust our policies based on subsequent actions by the Government of Belarus. Lack of progress on the issues of concern would further complicate our relations.

We emphasize that the measures described by Assistant Secretary Crowley are not aimed at the Belarusian people. Indeed, the United States is planning this year to expand by at least 30 percent its assistance to Belarusian civil society, independent media, and democratic political parties, specifically including support for activities which will increase Belarusians' contact with open societies.

The United States continues to coordinate its response to the crackdown in Belarus closely with the European Union and other partners. In this regard, we welcome the decision of the European Union's Foreign Affairs Council on January 31 to impose travel restrictions and an asset freeze, and to strengthen its support to civil society. We were heartened to learn yesterday that the European Union will quadruple its assistance to € 15.6 million in support of human rights and democracy in Belarus.

We take note of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon's shared concern "about reports of harassment and continued detention of journalists, civil society activists, and opposition candidates." We also share OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media Mijatovic's disappointment that the Belarusian authorities blocked her visit in January, particularly in light of previous assurances that they were committed to continue working with OSCE institutions.

We listened carefully to Ambassador Sychov's reply at last week's Permanent Council and we agree on the importance of peaceful demonstrations, but he is mistaken in asserting a double or triple standard in the international community's response to his government's harsh reaction to demonstrators on December 19, and to the ongoing harassment and raids targeting numerous Belarusian civil society groups, opposition politicians, and independent media outlets. There is no different standard for Belarus. What is different – and worse – is how the Belarusian government has reacted to its own citizens. The Ambassador also complained about a lack of respect and objectivity in reference to these events. We strongly differ; the international community is holding Belarus to the same OSCE commitments that we have all undertaken and we are exercising our prerogative as a participating State to speak out when we believe Belarus is not upholding those commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.