



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 7, 2012

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States continues to be deeply concerned about serious violations of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law in Belarus.

We wish to direct the attention of the Permanent Council to the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Belarus, to be presented to the next session of the UN Human Rights Council. The report notes that "Since the [December 2010] elections, the human rights situation has further deteriorated, particularly the rights to freedoms of association, assembly and expression, and the right to a fair trial. Allegations of torture and ill-treatment in custody, impunity of perpetrators, violations of due judicial process and pressure on defense lawyers persist. The lack of an independent judiciary and a national human rights institution aggravate the human rights situation and impede progress."

Among the many relevant recommendations contained in the report is to "[s]tudy the findings and observations reflected in the report of the OSCE election observation mission in Belarus, the report of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur, and the report of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on trial monitoring in Belarus, and implement fully the recommendations made therein." We reiterate that call today.

The High Commissioner's report covers the period from December 19, 2010 to March 23, 2012. Unfortunately, the situation has continued to deteriorate since then.

We continue to find the Government's actions to control freedom of movement of its citizens deplorable. We note that former political prisoners Andrei Sannikov and Dmitri Bondarenko were recently stopped at the Belarusian border. We call on the government to cease harassment of and restore fully the civil and political rights of all former political prisoners and to uphold its OSCE commitments by not restricting the freedom of movement of its citizens.

We remain deeply concerned regarding the continued harsh treatment of independent journalists. On May 31, RFE/RL correspondent Ina Studzinskaja was detained for three hours and reportedly assaulted while on assignment in Svetlahorsk to cover a meeting of opposition activists and local residents. Three other journalists, Alina Radachynskaya, Aliaksandr Barazenska, Siarhei Balay, and activist Mikhail Pashkevich, were also detained. On June 1, Pashkevich was sentenced to seven days of administrative arrest.

That same day, journalists Yan Roman, Yuliya Kalyda and Andrei Pochobut were detained in Grodno while trying to cover a picket by members of the Union of Poles, and two TV journalists, Tatiana Belosheva and Olga Chajchyts, were detained in Minsk, reportedly for trying to film a celebration of Children's Day.

A total of some 20 participants were arrested during the peaceful protest in Grodno on June 1 over the imposition of the Russian language at a Polish-funded school. Trials of those detained were held yesterday, and judgments of those arrested ranged from several days of administrative detention to the imposition of fines as high as 5 million Belarusian rubles.

We remain concerned regarding the continued interference in the lives of and administrative detention of opposition activists, including Young Front members Mikhail Muski, Zmitser Kremianetski, Raman Vasilyeu, Mikalai Dzemidzenka and Pavel Vinahradau. In one example of this mistreatment campaign, on May 24, Aleh Volchek, Head of "Legal Aid to the Population," an organization that provided legal assistance until it was forced to close by the government in 2003, was arrested by plain-clothed police officers who accused him of supposedly "swearing in public." He was sentenced to nine days of administrative detention.

In another instance, on May 31, Alexei Pikulik, academic director of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS), was arrested near his apartment building. He was accused of alleged "hooliganism." He was sentenced to five days arrest. His passport was confiscated by the authorities on April 6th, and his freedom of movement has been inhibited since then.

Mr. Chairman, we renew our call on the Government of Belarus to honor its OSCE commitments, release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally, ensure restoration of their full political and civil rights, and stop the ongoing harassment of political activists, civil society representatives, human rights activists, and independent journalists.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.