

United States Mission to the OSCE



Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 21, 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 note that June 16 marked the one-year anniversary of the presentation of the report of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur to the Permanent Council. This report, along with the report of the OSCE election observation mission and the ODIHR report on trial monitoring, contains succinct recommendations that, if acted upon, could curtail the deterioration of the human rights situation in Belarus. This has not occurred.

In 2011 and into 2012, the Government of Belarus has continued its crackdown against political opposition, civil society, and independent media. The government arbitrarily arrested, detained, and imprisoned citizens for criticizing officials, participating in demonstrations, and defending human rights, and prevented independent media from disseminating information and materials, while imposing systematic travel bans imposed on opposition activists, human rights defenders and independent media.

As a result, I report to the Permanent Council that President Obama extended the National Emergency with regard to Belarus on June 14. The President took this action to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States. This threat is constituted by the actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Belarus to undermine Belarus's democratic processes or institutions; to commit human rights abuses related to political repression, including detentions and disappearances; and to engage in public corruption, including by diverting or misusing Belarusian public assets or by misusing public authority.

We reiterate our call to release all political prisoners, including Ales Byalyatsky, 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. We also call on the Government of Belarus to honor its OSCE commitments and urge the Government to issue an unrestricted invitation to ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and other participating States to observe the September 23 parliamentary elections in a timely manner.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.