

Canadian Delegation to the
Organization for Security & Cooperation
in Europe



Délégation du Canada auprès de
l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération
en Europe

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**DELEGATION OF CANADA TO THE OSCE
JOINT STATEMENT DELIVERED BY
AMBASSADOR FREDERICKA GREGORY ON BEHALF OF A GROUP OF
PARTICIPATING STATES**

CURRENT ISSUES: JOINT STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN BELARUS

**894TH MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
15 DECEMBER 2011**

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.

I have the honour and privilege to take the floor today on behalf of the following participating States: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States of America. The final list of countries will be distributed to the OSCE Secretariat.

We continue to be deeply concerned about the grave violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus, particularly those enshrined in OSCE commitments.

It is almost one year since the violent suppression of demonstrations that took place in Belarus following the presidential elections of 19 December 2010. These events marked the beginning of the brutal crackdown on Belarusian political opposition, human rights defenders, independent media and representatives of civil society. We have expressed repeatedly our deep concerns about the lack of respect for the OSCE norms, principles and commitments, as well as international human rights standards in Belarus, notably in respect of freedom of assembly and association, freedom of expression, and the rule of law. Our concerns are further deepened by allegations of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of political opposition activists arrested by the Belarusian authorities.

The abrupt termination of the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk on 31 December 2010 was a further step backwards in terms of the co-operation of Belarus with the OSCE. We continue to believe that an OSCE presence in Minsk could serve a role beneficial to Belarus. Therefore, we reiterate our call on Belarus to allow a meaningful OSCE presence in the country.

The dramatic developments in Belarus resulted in the invocation of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism. Tomorrow it will have been six months to the day since the OSCE Rapporteur's report prepared in accordance with the Moscow Mechanism was presented and discussed at the Permanent Council. The findings of this report, prepared by Professor Emmanuel Decaux, confirmed our critical assessment of the situation in Belarus and the non-compliance by Belarus with its OSCE commitments. The report also brought us closer to understanding the scope and nature of the wave of repressions following last year's presidential elections in Belarus. During that meeting of the Permanent Council the Belarusian authorities were called on to fully utilise the report and do their utmost to implement recommendations contained therein.

Unfortunately, there has been no tangible improvement so far in the human rights situation in Belarus. On the contrary, the recent ODIHR report on trial monitoring in Belarus, as well as the message coming from the non-governmental organizations involved in promoting human rights in Belarus, present in Vilnius during the recent Ministerial Council meeting, indicate that the situation remains grave and requires the OSCE's full and continuous attention.

We, therefore, urge the Belarusian authorities to address without further delay the concerns raised in the OSCE Rapporteur's report on Belarus, as well as those presented in the ODIHR report on trial monitoring, and to implement the recommendations contained therein.

We call on the Belarusian authorities to engage constructively with the OSCE and its institutions with a view to better implementing their commitments undertaken within the OSCE framework.

We reiterate our call on Belarus to release and rehabilitate immediately all political prisoners and to stop harassment of members of the opposition and civil society, including human right defenders, independent journalists, defence attorneys and students. In particular we are concerned about the treatment and health of Andrei Sannikau, Mikalai Statkevich, Zmitser Dashkevich and Zmitser Bandarenka.

We continue to follow closely further developments in Belarus, not only in the context of the OSCE, but also elsewhere, including in the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Thank you.