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United States Mission to the OSCE

Call for New Dialogue to Lead to New Presidential Election in Belarus

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 18, 2021

As President Biden stated, U.S. diplomacy should be rooted in America’s most cherished democratic values: defending freedom, championing opportunity, respecting human rights and the rule of law, and treating every person with dignity. Therefore, the United States is proud to support today’s renewed calls for genuine dialogue between Belarusian authorities and the political opposition, including the *Coordination Council* and members of Belarusian civil society. The United States hopes such a dialogue will lead to the negotiations necessary for new, free, and fair elections in Belarus, and finds the OSCE particularly well-suited to facilitate this process.

Dialogue, along with an end to the violent crackdown and the release of all political prisoners and all others unjustly detained, is necessary for resolving the political crisis in Belarus.

It is unconscionable that nearly 300 political prisoners are incarcerated in Belarus. This is an assault on human rights and fundamental freedoms. The use of violence and other repressive tools to suppress dissent and punish those exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression stand in blatant disregard of Belarus’s commitments as an OSCE participating State and its obligations under international law.

When governments respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, democratic institutions, and the rule of law, countries are more stable and secure and are better equipped to confront global challenges. The people of Belarus deserve a real voice in their future. To all of those risking their lives to confront tyranny: America hears you. America sees you. And America stands with you.

Time has only increased the need for Belarusian authorities to have genuine engagement with the Belarusian people. The United States once again thanks the Swedish Chairperson in Office—and the 2020 Albanian Chair—for offering to facilitate a national dialogue between the Belarusian authorities and those leading the call for democracy and human rights. Once again, we urge Alyaksandr Lukashenka to accept that offer. Together with our partners and allies, the

United States will continue to speak out in support of the Belarusian people's democratic aspirations to live in a free, democratic, and independent country.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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