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to the OSCE

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auprès de l'OSCE

**JOINT STATEMENT DELIVERED BY ESTHER VAN NES, CHARGÉE D'AFFAIRES
UNDER CURRENT ISSUE:**

The Human Rights situation in Belarus

1533rd MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL

11 September 2025

Mr. Chair

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the following members of the Informal Group of Friends of Democratic Belarus: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Ukraine and my own country Canada.

The following participating States are also joining this statement: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Liechtenstein, Malta, Moldova, North Macedonia, San Marino, and Switzerland.

Five years ago, following the August 2020 presidential election, the people of Belarus stood up for democracy, gathering peacefully to oppose a fraudulent result that betrayed their trust and democratic aspirations.

In response, the Lukashenko regime launched a brutal and systematic crackdown on peaceful protestors.

According to the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, at least 13,500 persons were arrested in the six days following the announcement of the election results. By May 2021, over 37,000 people had been arrested and detained in relation to the protests.

In the years since, the Belarusian authorities have pursued a relentless campaign to shut down civil society, silence independent media and eliminate any form of political opposition. Thousands have been unjustly detained, subjected to torture and ill-treatment, or forced into exile. The authorities have expanded and misused “anti-extremism” and “anti-terrorism” laws to punish the legitimate exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

According to the Human Rights Center Viasna, at least 8,519 people have faced criminal prosecution for political reasons since 2020, and more than 100,000 cases of repression have been recorded.

As documented in the 2023 OSCE Moscow Mechanism Report and subsequent UN reports, Belarus has failed to uphold its international human rights obligations and its OSCE commitments, including those related to holding free, fair elections and the inviting of OSCE/ODIHR election observers in a timely manner.

Moreover, Belarus's support for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and instrumentalization of illegal migration, further underscores its disregard for international peace and security, and for its OSCE commitments.

While the release of a few hundred political prisoners since July 2024 is a welcome development, we remain deeply concerned by the continued arrests and persecution of individuals for exercising their human rights.

We are also mindful of those who, upon release, have been forced to flee Belarus or remain under continued surveillance and repression, effectively extending their punishment beyond imprisonment.

When some political prisoners are released, others are imprisoned. This endless cycle must be broken.

According to Viasna, over 1,100 individuals remain detained for political reasons. Many are subjected to torture and ill-treatment, including prolonged isolation and denial of medical care.

Nine political prisoners have already died in custody with the death of 36-year-old Andrei Padniabenny recently reported by his mother.

We reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of these prisoners and their effective rehabilitation and urge the Belarusian authorities to end their campaign of repression.

Five years on, the courage of the Belarusian people has not been forgotten. We remain steadfast in our support for their aspirations for a free, democratic and independent Belarus.