



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# Plight of Political Prisoners and Protestors in Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
May 9, 2013

The United States is concerned about the detention and conviction of participants and journalists arrested during an authorized march on April 26 to recognize the anniversary of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, as well as the May 6 detention of two journalists.

On April 29, a Minsk court sentenced Alyaksandr Tarnahurski, Dzmitry Charnyak, Vyacheslav Dashkevich, and Igor Trukhanovich to up to ten days' imprisonment for allegedly disobeying lawful orders and on other misdemeanor charges. Two journalists of the Polish-based, *Radio Ratsiya*, Henadz Barbarych and Alyaksandr Yarashevich, were also arrested and received three-day sentences for disobeying lawful orders.

Mr. Chairman, these arrests and subsequent convictions are symptomatic of Belarus' ongoing lack of respect for press freedom, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. The march was sanctioned by Belarus authorities and was conducted peacefully. Nevertheless, key march organizers were detained (although not charged) before the event and participants were later arrested, while journalists were detained as they returned to their offices after covering the march. The arrests were particularly regrettable since they occurred in conjunction with the commemoration of an event that continues to affect the health and welfare of hundreds of Belarusians to the present day.

On May 6, police again detained Mr. Yarashevich on misdemeanor charges, along with a blogger, Dmitrii Galko, as they returned from the detention facility where they met those released in connection with the Chernobyl march.

The United States remains deeply concerned that 2010 Presidential candidate Nikolay Statkevich, human rights defender Ales Byalyatski, and many other political prisoners, remain incarcerated.

We take this opportunity to reiterate our call on the Government of Belarus to honor its OSCE commitments, to release all political prisoners, immediately and unconditionally, and to restore their full civil and political rights. Respect for democracy and human rights in Belarus remains central to overcoming the country's self-imposed isolation and is essential to the progress of the country and welfare of its citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.