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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

**STATEMENT OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION
ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS
707TH PLENARY SESSION OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
3 APRIL 2008**

Canada remains concerned that the Belarusian government continues to disregard international appeals to respect human rights and democratic principles.

Canada is especially concerned about the situation with respect to the human rights situation in Belarus, in particular its treatment of human rights defenders.

Canada was encouraged in recent months by a number of positive initiatives on the part of the Belarusian government. We note in particular the release of a number of political prisoners, the easing of the situation with respect to the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the steps taken to finalize the opening of a European Commission office in Minsk.

Regrettably these positive steps were followed by the violent break up of the peaceful commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the establishment of the Belarus Democratic Government on March 25th and the searches of the offices of independent media and journalists on March 26th.

Canada urges the government of Belarus to respect the rights of its citizens, including the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association, as well as the right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. Canada further calls on the government of Belarus to respect the right to freedom of opinion and expression, which is a cornerstone of free societies. Restrictions of this right by the government of Belarus are seriously hindering the promotion and protection of other rights. We therefore urge the government of Belarus to allow its independent media to broadcast and publish freely and without interference.