

The OSCE Secretariat bears no responsibility for the content of this document and circulates it without altering its content. The distribution by OSCE Conference Services of this document is without prejudice to OSCE decisions, as set out in documents agreed by OSCE participating States.

PC.DEL/1299/20  
8 October 2020

Original: ENGLISH



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **Attacks on Freedom of Opinion and Expression of Media Freedom in Belarus**

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Courtney Austrian  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
October 8, 2020

The United States shares the concerns of the European Union and the other participating States who have spoken on the ongoing suppression of freedom of expression by Belarusian authorities. This situation underscores our concern about the authorities' readiness to respect Belarus's international obligations and its blatant disregard of its OSCE commitments. Since the fraudulent August 9 elections, the authorities in Minsk carried out a campaign of detention and abuse of peaceful protesters and journalists, revocation of journalists' accreditation, blocking of independent media, opposition websites, and internet access. We call upon the Belarusian authorities to cease this repression immediately.

In an ongoing attempt to prevent the outside world from learning the true extent of the popular protests against the illegitimate elections, the Belarusian authorities canceled the accreditation of all foreign journalists on October 2, making it more difficult for them to report on events of public interest, such as the ongoing protests taking place across the country.

While the stated reason for this action was to make the process "easier" with a new accreditation system starting October 5, the announcement of the move revealed the authorities' true motivations. The changes were made, the order said, in order to protect "our sovereign right" to "protect ourselves." A few days before, on September 29, the authorities stripped leading independent news portal TUT.by of its media status for three months. Without this status, TUT.by journalists are prevented from reporting on events of public importance, such as protests. Along with the continued detentions of protestors and journalists by the Belarusian authorities, it is clear the powers in Minsk are trying to deprive their citizens from objective sources of information and prevent the true picture of what is taking place in Belarus from making its way to the outside world. This is in their own interest, not in the interest of the Belarusian people.

In addition to the crackdown on freedom of expression, I must take a moment to voice my deep concern over media reports that Vitali Shkliarov's health is deteriorating in detention, nor has he received adequate medical care. The Ambassador noted just last week the serious concerns of the United States about his health. Not one more day of wrongful detention is acceptable. The United States demands the immediate release of Vitali.

The United States condemns the campaign of brutality and intimidation carried out by Belarusian authorities against peaceful protestors and journalists.

The *Belarusian Association of Journalists* has documented over 200 cases of detentions and violence against journalists since the protests began. We also condemn authorities' efforts to block internet service as well as independent media and opposition websites and disrupt access to social media. We call again on the Belarusian authorities to immediately end the violence against the Belarusian people, release all those unjustly detained, including Vitali, and account for those reported missing. The United States continues to urge the Belarusian authorities to accept the OSCE Chairmanship's offer to facilitate a genuine, inclusive national dialogue with Belarusian civil society and political opposition to discuss a way forward that leads to a free and fair election under independent observation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.