



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Political Prisoners in Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 16, 2023

It is deeply regrettable that the Lukashenka regime continues to flagrantly violate and abuse human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus.

On February 8, Andrzej Poczobut, a Belarusian-Polish journalist, was sentenced to eight years in prison on false charges. Poczobut is a widely respected journalist, and the authorities targeted him for carrying out his journalistic duties in covering election-related protests and peaceful dissent, as well as his advocacy for the rights of members of the Polish minority in Belarus. Instead of fostering a free and open society, Belarusian authorities resort to repression to preserve their grip on power. Instead of honoring its OSCE commitments, Belarus contravenes them daily. Instead of celebrating brave pro-democracy leaders, civil society activists, independent media, and human rights defenders, Belarus punishes them.

On February 9, Belarusian prosecutors announced they were seeking a 12-year prison sentence for Ales Bialiatski, a 2022 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, on ridiculous politically motivated charges related to his decades long work as a leading human rights defender and his efforts as well to advance democracy in Belarus. The regime is also prosecuting a number of Bialiatski's colleagues and fellow human rights defenders, including Valiantsin Stefanovich and Uladzimir Labkovich, who are being unjustly held in detention in Belarus, and Zmitser Salauyou, who is now in exile. The Belarusian authorities are calling for sentences of 9-11 years of imprisonment.

We call for the immediate, unconditional release of Poczobut, Bialiatski, Stefanovich, and Labkovich, as well as leading political opposition figures such as Syarhey Tsikhanouski, Viktor Barbaryka, and Mariya Kalesnikava, and the more than 1,400 political prisoners Belarus continues to unjustly incarcerate. As a member of the OSCE community, Belarus committed to respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and it is well beyond time that it started doing so.

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