



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 26, 2012

The United States continues to be gravely concerned about serious disregard by Belarus of its international obligations and OSCE commitments on respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.

We remain deeply concerned about the condition of political prisoners in Belarus. We note that additional charges recently brought against the leader of the youth opposition movement Young Front, Zmitser Dashkevich, could extend his politically-motivated imprisonment one year or more past his scheduled release this December. We also note with disappointment that former political prisoner Vasil Parfiankov again faces politically-motivated charges and imprisonment.

We also remain troubled about travel restrictions on members of the democratic opposition, human rights activists, and members of independent media in Belarus. We welcome the news that several individuals were removed from the list of those banned to travel outside Belarus, including Viktor Kornienko, Oleg Gulak, Valiantsin Stefanovich, Anatoly Lebedko, and Andrei Bandarenka, with an explanation that they had been placed on the list, some in early March, due to a "technical error." However, we are aware of worrisome reports that Andrei Bandarenka has been placed on a KGB list prohibiting his departure from Belarus. We remind Belarus of its obligation under international law to respect the right of its citizens to leave their country and return to it.

On July 24, the Minsk City court rejected an appeal of a new six-month sentence against "Tell the Truth" campaign activist and political prisoner Vasil Parfyankou. He was given this sentence on May 29, 2012, for violating the terms of his 2011 release. Parfyankou, who was originally convicted for participating in "mass disturbances" following the December 2010 elections, was sentenced to four years imprisonment, but was granted an early pardon in August 2011. We consider these trials to have been politically motivated.

We request the Belarusian delegation to provide for the Permanent Council information regarding the detention of journalist student Anton Surapin, who allegedly posted a photograph of teddy bears dropped July 4 by the Swedish public relations firm Studio Total, and Sergei Basharimov who allegedly planned to rent an apartment to the firm. We understand that charges have either been filed or are being considered for complicity in deliberate illegal border crossing. It is especially troublesome that these individuals are being detained for and/or charged with complicity in illegal border crossing since the Ministry of Defense has denied that an illegal border crossing has occurred.

We reiterate our call on Belarus to release all political prisoners, immediately and unconditionally, to restore their full political and civil rights, and to stop the ongoing harassment of the democratic opposition, civil society, and human rights activists and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.