

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

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**DELEGATION OF CANADA TO THE OSCE
STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR FREDERICKA GREGORY
ON THE SITUATION IN BELARUS IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE DECEMBER
ELECTIONS AND THE CLOSURE OF THE MINSK OFFICE
846 MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
13 JANUARY 2011**

Mr. Chairman:

Earlier this month, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada expressed the Government of Canada's deep disappointment at the decision by Belarus to close the OSCE Office in Minsk''.

In our view, the Office has provided valuable support for the promotion of institution-building, the consolidation of the rule of law and development of relations with civil society in accordance with OSCE principles and commitments. We do not believe that the Office has completed its mandate.

The OSCE has been conducting important work in areas such as the promotion of democracy and human rights in Belarus, but more needs to be done and this work should continue. The need for such work has been clearly underlined by the violence and repression that followed the December 19, 2010, presidential election.

The decision of Belarus authorities to close the OSCE Office in Minsk is a further indication that we are witnessing a regrettable step backwards in Belarus and for its citizens. Canada reiterates its call for the authorities in Belarus to change direction and uphold democratic principles, respect for human rights and the rule of law. We urge the authorities in Belarus to reconsider their decision on the OSCE Office, and to continue to work with the OSCE and affiliated institutions in meeting Belarus' OSCE commitments.

Mr. Chairman,

We also take this opportunity to urge Belarusian authorities to put an end to the hostile actions against independent media, as reported by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. We also call for the immediate release of imprisoned journalists.

Mr. Chairman,

Canada will continue to work with other free and democratic societies in developing our response to the situation in Belarus.

Canada will continue to uphold the restrictions on official contact and trade with Belarus that were put in place after the flawed elections of 2006.

Thank you.