



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Continuing Situation in Belarus

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a. i. Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 24, 2011

The United States remains gravely concerned over the continuing post-election crackdown by the Government of Belarus. As we continue to monitor the situation, we would like to inform the participating States of yet another troubling trend with regard to the Belarusian Government's crackdown on civil society.

As Secretary Clinton said last month in Munich, the transition to democracy is more likely to be peaceful and permanent when it involves both the government in power and a broad cross-section of the governed. Civil society holds governments accountable and helps them be more effective. But civil society plays an even more fundamental role. It helps to strengthen the basic bonds of trust that are essential to democracy.

The International Observation Mission of the Committee on International Control over the Situation with Human Rights in Belarus (IOM), a coalition of over 30 human rights NGOs from across Europe, was established to inform the international community and the Government of Belarus about the human rights situation in Belarus. The Mission's reports have been objective and comprehensive.

Nevertheless, the Government of Belarus has impeded the IOM's efforts to report on conditions in Belarus. On March 9, Maxim Kitsyuk, an IOM member and member of the Ukrainian NGO "Foundation of Regional Initiatives," was turned back at the border and forced to return to Ukraine after being informed by border officials that he was allegedly on a list of persons banned from entering Belarus. On March 16 in Minsk, Russian citizen Andrey Yurov, the Head of the IOM and Director of Development of the Moscow Helsinki Group, was arrested and detained overnight. On March 17, Mr. Yurov received a deportation order to leave Belarus within 24 hours because he is included on the list of persons whose entry is forbidden or undesirable. A spokesperson for the Belarus Foreign Ministry told Interfax he had no knowledge of the existence of lists of banned citizens. Yet, according to the order Mr. Yurov received, the KGB of Belarus has forbidden his entry until the year 2013.

These actions appear to violate OSCE freedom of movement commitments, in particular Copenhagen 1990 para 43.2, whereby "[participating States will] endeavour to facilitate visits to their countries by NGOs from within any of the participating States in order to observe human dimension conditions."

We urge Belarus to honor its commitments regarding freedom of movement, to release immediately and unconditionally those detained in the crackdown on civil society,

independent media and the political opposition, and to reverse the alarming trends that have emerged in the aftermath of the flawed December 19 Presidential election.
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.