

18 August 2020

Statement of the network of Human Rights Houses

European governments must call on the United Nations to conduct an immediate investigation into human rights abuses in Belarus

We, the undersigned members of the network of Human Rights Houses, urge European governments to call on the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to immediately launch an international commission of inquiry into human rights violations in Belarus in relation to the August 9 presidential elections. The challenges facing Belarus in this time are immense and an immediate international commission of inquiry will provide independent and objective reporting of human rights violations which could hamper the country's efforts to address those challenges.

Since August 9, more than 7,000 protesters have been arrested in Belarus, with many of those tortured while in detention. Independent media sources have reported the deaths of at least two protesters by security personnel, one while in detention. In the last week, journalists have been rounded up across the country and arbitrarily detained. Human rights defenders face further reprisals, including arbitrary detention and seizing of personal property. Against this backdrop, Europe must act and must call for the launch of an immediate international commission of inquiry into post-election violence and reported human rights violations in Belarus and to make the on-going findings of this commission public.

Since the announcement of the re-election of President Aleksandr Lukashenka in what is widely considered to be a fraudulent election, tens of thousands of people have gathered in the streets of Minsk and other cities to oppose this outcome. On August 16 media outlets and civil society observers in the country reported a demonstration of more than 200,000 people in Minsk, the largest in the country's history. The people of Belarus are calling for new, free, and fair elections and respect of their rights. The international community has a responsibility to heed the calls of the Belarusian people. An international commission of inquiry will provide an opportunity for an objective and independent examination into human rights violations currently taking place in Belarus.

European states and the European Union were critical in 2012 in the establishment of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus. This mandate provides for a Special Procedures mechanism to monitor the situation of human rights in Belarus; and, seek, receive, examine, and act on information from all relevant stakeholders pertaining to human rights in Belarus. However, human rights violations in relation to the August 9 presidential election require a deeper level of engagement from the international community. It is critical that the High Commissioner immediately launch an international commission of inquiry in order to bring to light and address on-going and systematic human rights violations in Belarus.

Europe must support the Belarusian people as they seek new, free, and fair elections and the respect for their rights which will make those elections possible. In the immediate, Europe must support this call for an international commission of inquiry and must support it now.

Signed by:

- **Human Rights House Yerevan** on behalf of the following member organisations:
 - PINK
 - Women's Resource Center, Armenia
 - Real World, Real People
 - Socioscope
 - Armenian PEN Center



- **Human Rights House Azerbaijan** on behalf of the following member organisations:
 - Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center
 - Women’s Association for Rational Development

- **Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House** on behalf of the following member organisations:
 - Belarusian Association of Journalists
 - Belarusian Helsinki Committee
 - Belarusian PEN Centre
 - Lev Sapieha Foundation
 - Francišak Skaryna Belarusian Language Society
 - Legal Initiative
 - Supolnasc Center
 - Viasna

- **Human Rights House Crimea** on behalf of the following member organisations:
 - Almenda
 - Crimean Human Rights Group
 - ZMINA. Human Rights Centre
 - Regional Centre for Human Rights

- **Human Rights House Zagreb** on behalf of the following member organisations:
 - B.a.B.e. Be active. Be emancipated
 - Centre for Peace Studies
 - Croatian Youth Network
 - Croatian Platform for International Citizen Solidarity (CROSOL)
 - Documenta – Centre for Dealing with the Past

- **Human Rights House Tbilisi** on behalf of the following member organisations:
 - Rights Georgia
 - Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT)
 - Human Rights Centre (HRIDC)
 - Media Institute
 - Sapari

- **Rafto Foundation**

- **Human Rights House Oslo** on behalf of the following member organisations:
 - Health and Human Rights Info
 - Human Rights House Foundation

- **Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights**

- **Russian Research Centre for Human Rights** on behalf of the following member organisations:
 - Independent Psychiatric Association of Russia
 - Moscow Center for Prison Reform
 - Moscow Helsinki Group
 - Right of the Child
 - Regional civic initiative - the right to life and civil dignity
 - Social Partnership Foundation
 - Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia
 - Centre d’Initiative du Caucase



- **Human Rights House Voronezh**
 - Civic Initiatives Development Center
 - Memorial Voronezh
 - Olga A. Gnezdilova, independent lawyer
 - Confederation of Free Labour
 - Youth Human Rights Group
 - Russian Union of Writers
 - Lawyers for Labor Rights
 - Charitable Foundation “For environmental and social justice”
 - Free University
 - Art-group “Quadro”

- **Human Rights House Belgrade** on behalf of the following member organisations:
 - Belgrade Centre for Human Rights
 - Civic Initiatives
 - Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia
 - YUCOM - Lawyers Committee for Human Rights
 - Policy Center

- **Educational Human Rights House Chernihiv** on behalf of the following member organisations:
 - NGO “MART”
 - Human Rights Vector NGO
 - No Borders Project
 - Centre of Civil Education "Almenda"
 - Ahalar
 - Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union
 - Moloda Prosvita Prykarpattia
 - ZMINA. Human Rights Center

- **Human Rights House London** on behalf of the following member organisation:
 - Index on Censorship