

Human rights violations in Belarus: UK statement, 17 December 2020



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Mr Chair,

It is out of necessity that we again raise our concerns about the situation in Belarus. We remain appalled by the continuing and unacceptable human rights violations occurring there. 300 peaceful protestors were detained this week including more than 90 pensioners detained following Monday's March of Wisdom, many of whom were held overnight. There has been no effort to investigate allegations of violence and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Medical professionals, academics, students, artists and sports people have all faced persecution for calling for a change to the current situation.

Attacks on media freedom and freedom of expression continue too. On 3 December, the Belarusian courts rescinded the official status of non-state media website [Tut.by](https://tut.by). This has stripped [Tut.by](https://tut.by)'s journalists of the official protection that accredited journalists have the right to expect when doing their job. On 10 December, Belarusian authorities banned the display of the opposition's insignia, the white-red-white flag. Now, any display of this flag will be interpreted as an unauthorised demonstration punishable by fine or arrest.

Mr Chair,

The rule of law is fundamental to the recognition and preservation of human rights. Yet in Belarus the law is being used as an arbitrary instrument to further political ends and quash democratic rights. Over 30,000 people have been arbitrarily detained since the electoral campaign began in May. Sometimes this is for a few hours or days. Tribunals often increase the period of detention. 150 people are currently imprisoned and facing politically motivated criminal charges,

including prominent members of the opposition such as Sergey Tikhanovsky, Viktor Babaryka, Maria Kolesnikova and Maksim Znak. In many cases, appeals have been denied. We are concerned by reports that a Children's Hospice in Hrodno is being threatened by closure following the Director's attendance as an independent observer during the elections and her alleged public criticism of the authorities.

Mr Chair,

On the 4 December, the UK led a Joint Statement on behalf of 42 countries at the UN Human Rights Council condemning the use of force by the Belarusian authorities. On 9 December, the British Embassy in Minsk joined the Missions of the EU, the US and Switzerland to raise our concerns to the Belarusian Foreign Minister. The Missions called on the authorities to change course, respect the rights of its people, release detainees, allow observation of the conditions in detention centres, and undertake a full investigation of the allegations of human rights violations. We repeat these calls here and, furthermore, we urge the Belarusian authorities to cooperate with Professor Benedek's report under the Moscow Mechanism, and implement its recommendations. That includes the holding of new elections, which meet international standards, and are acceptable to the people of Belarus.

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