

54th session of the Human Rights Council

Item 4: Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's oral update on the situation of human rights in Belarus

Mr. President,

Right Livelihood and Human Rights Center "Viasna" thank the high commissioner for his update on the situation in Belarus, where human rights work is equated with extremism and fundamental freedoms are criminalised.

Political prisoners, who are now over 1500, are systematically held in inhumane conditions and face harassment from prison authorities. Outside prison walls, the climate of fear under which Belarusians now live is pushing a record-high number of them into exile. We are appalled by the attempt of the authorities to expand the repression across borders, including by allowing trials in absentia and prohibiting the issuance of passports to all Belarusians abroad.

Throughout the crisis, Human Rights Center "Viasna" has played a key role in shedding light on the systematic violations committed by Belarus, despite arrests and reprisals. Since August 23, it has been listed as an "extremist formation" for allegedly organising activities aimed at preparing attacks on the sovereignty of Belarus and insulting its officials. Anyone engaging with them is now criminally liable, and at risk of arrest. As a result, numerous individuals are now refraining from reporting violations.

Mr. President,

We cannot let abuses go unreported and fall into oblivion. Accountability must be provided. We, therefore, call on the Council to consider establishing a fully independent investigative mechanism for Belarus and to continue urging the Belarusian authorities to release all political prisoners, including Viasna members: Ales Bialiatski, Valiantsin Stefanovic, Uladzimir Labkovich, Marfa Rabkova and Andrei Chapiuk, and to promptly align with its international human rights obligations.

Thank you