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57<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council

Oral Statement

## Interactive Dialogue with the Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus

Mr. President,

Right Livelihood and Human Rights Center “Viasna” congratulate the group of independent experts for their appointment and thank them for the oral update provided today.

As a new cycle of Presidential elections draws near, we remain appalled by the persistent repression of all fundamental freedoms in the country. While we welcome the release of some political prisoners, the reality is that arbitrary arrests continue to occur weekly. Authorities persist in labeling individuals and organizations as extremists or terrorists, trying even those who left the country *in absentia*, further intensifying the crackdown and silencing dissenting voices.

There remains 1351 political prisoners in the country enduring harsh conditions, and inhumane treatment including torture. According to the latest figures, six of them are held totally incommunicado, for others, communication is extremely limited. Since his imprisonment in July 2021, Human Rights Center “Viasna”'s Chairman, Ales Bialiatski, has only been able to exchange few postcards with his family.

Mr. President,

We cannot let the next Belarusian presidential election be a replay of 2020. International accountability remains crucial. While we continue to call on all concerned States to use their provisions on universal jurisdiction to hold Belarusian authorities accountable for their crimes, we ask the Group of Experts : How do you intend to coordinate with other accountability mechanisms to expand the investigation into gross human rights violations committed in Belarus ?

Thank you.