

December 2, 2020

To Mr. Aliaksandr Lukashenka

To Mr. Andrei Shved,
General Prosecutor of Belarus

To Mr. Oleg Slizhivsky,
Minister of Justice of Belarus

To Mr. Yury Ambrazevich,
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Office and other
International Organisations in Geneva

To Mr. Aliaksandr Mikhnevich,
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus to the European Union

Urgent appeal: end persecution of peaceful protesters and human rights activists in Belarus

We, the undersigned, write to you to strongly condemn the ongoing government crackdown on peaceful demonstrators, and the persecution of activists, journalists and human rights defenders in Belarus. In particular, we deplore that members and volunteers of 2020 Right Livelihood Laureate Human Rights Center “Viasna” have been continuously targeted in retaliation for their peaceful human rights activities.

The aftermath of the fraudulent 2020 Presidential Elections, held on August 9, 2020, has been marked by an unprecedented level of protest activity against the regime. In response, State authorities have deployed disproportionate and unacceptable violence resulting in injuries to hundreds of individuals and several confirmed deaths. During this brutal crackdown on protesters, human rights organizations have documented widespread human rights violations, including mass arbitrary arrests, prosecutions under trumped-up charges, torture and other ill-treatment. Rights to freedom of opinion and expression, association and peaceful assembly have been violently curtailed. As of November 14, 2020, according to Viasna, there are 121 political prisoners in Belarus.

These facts were recently confirmed by the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Report on Belarus, released on November 5, which states that there is “overwhelming evidence that the presidential elections of 9 August 2020 have been falsified and that massive and systematic human rights violations have been committed by the Belarusian security forces in response to peaceful demonstrations and protests.” The report also notes that in response to the above, no one has been held accountable, not a single investigation has been opened or a single official suspended. We deplore your refusal to participate in the Moscow Mechanism and to cooperate with the OSCE Rapporteur, Professor Dr. Wolfgang Benedek.

In this context of unprecedented mass repressions, we are deeply troubled by the pressure against and persecution of several activists of Viasna, a human rights organization honoured with the 2020 Right Livelihood Award. In fact, both before and after the elections, the authorities targeted them with criminal charges, administrative arrests and detention, and the blocking of the organization’s website, in what appears to be a clear attempt to undermine Viasna’s legitimate human rights activities.

On September 17, **Marfa Rabkova**, coordinator of Viasna’s volunteer service, was arrested on charges of “training or other preparation of persons for the participation in mass riots, or financing of such activities.” As part of her human rights activities, she observed peaceful assemblies and documented evidence of torture of detained protesters. She is now facing up to three years of imprisonment. We welcome the fact that on

November 2, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Ms. Mary Lawlor, released an official [statement](#) expressing concern about Ms. Rabkova's arrest and claimed that "the charge against Maria Rabkova is tantamount to the criminalisation of human rights work." We fully align ourselves with the Special Rapporteur's statement.

On October 2, Viasna volunteer **Andrei Chapiuk** faced the same ordeal. He was arrested and detained in Minsk, and charged with "participation in riots" a few days later. His crime is to have assisted political prisoners with the aim of protecting their rights.

Marfa Rabkova and Andrei Chapiuk are currently held in pre-trial detention centre No. 1 in Minsk.

We welcome the UN Human Rights Council's [resolution](#) on the situation in Belarus, adopted on September 18, and we believe that continued scrutiny by the international community is necessary to prevent any further escalation of violence. However, we remain deeply concerned by the recent intensification of repressions, guided by the authorities' determination to violently suppress all forms of dissent, and the deterioration of the human rights crisis in the country. In particular, on November 12, one more peaceful civilian, Raman Bandarenka, died at the hands of the country's security forces, which continue to enjoy blatant impunity.

We, therefore, urge you to:

- immediately and unconditionally release Viasna's human rights activists Marfa Rabkova and Andrei Chapiuk and drop all charges against them; release all protesters, journalists, human rights defenders, civil society activists and opposition members who have been detained in connection with the current wave of demonstrations solely for peacefully exercising their fundamental freedoms;
- immediately stop the persecution, harassment and intimidation of those who exercise their right to freedom of assembly, expression and association and ensure these rights to all Belarusian citizens;
- act in line with the Belarusian Constitution and international human rights obligations by allowing civil society and human rights defenders to carry out their peaceful human rights activities, free of any form of intimidation and reprisals;
- ensure that all individuals responsible for human rights abuses are investigated and prosecuted, with a view to ensuring full accountability and ending the cycle of impunity;
- seek a peaceful and democratic solution to the current crisis, and engage in an open and inclusive dialogue with representatives of the opposition and civil society.

We express our full solidarity with the Belarusian people in their struggle for democracy, and we are committed to further strengthen, in every way possible, the work of civil society, inside and outside Belarus, to advance the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the country.

Yours sincerely,

Heiko Maas, Minister of Foreign Affairs, SPD, Germany

Gyde Jensen, Chair of the Human Rights Commission, FDP, Germany

Christoph Matschie, Chair of Parlamentsgruppe Alternativer Nobelpreis, SPD, Germany

Dr. Bärbel Kofler, Commissioner for Human Rights Policy, SPD, Germany

Margarete Bause, Die Grünen, Germany

Norberg Röttgen, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, CDU, Germany

Dr. Gregor Gysi, Die Linke, Germany

Åsa Eriksson, Swedish Social Democratic Party

Lotta Johnson Fornarve, Third Vice Speaker, Left Party, Sweden

Jessica Thunander, Left Party, Sweden

Roland Utbult, The Christian Democrats, Sweden

Joar Forsell, The Liberals, Sweden

Håkan Svenneling, Left Party, Sweden

Anders Österberg, Swedish Social Democratic Party

Gudrun Brunegård, The Christian Democrats, Sweden

Désirée Pethrus, The Christian Democrats, Sweden

Camilla Brodin, The Christian Democrats, Sweden

Barbro Westerholm, The Liberals, Sweden

Jens Holm, Left Party, Sweden

Elisabeth Falkhaven, Swedish Green Party

Hans Eklind, The Christian Democrats, Sweden

Mikael Oscarsson, The Christian Democrats, Sweden

Magnus Oscarsson, The Christian Democrats, Sweden

Hampus Hagman, The Christian Democrats, Sweden

Magnus Jacobsson, The Christian Democrats, Sweden

Ingemar Kihlström, The Christian Democrats, Sweden

Ann-Britt Åsebol, Moderate Party, Sweden

Janine Alm Ericson, Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Swedish Green Party

Helena Vilhelmsson, Centre Party, Sweden

Alireza Akhondi, Centre Party, Sweden