

Political repression and death penalty in Belarus: Joint statement

Mr Chair, I am reading this statement on behalf of Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom. We join other participating States in condemning Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, in which Belarus is complicit. We commend the bravery of the Belarusian people in withholding their support for this war, and we deplore the harsh repression of those who speak out against the Lukashenko regime.

We strongly condemn proposed changes to the criminal code in Belarus to include new grounds for the death penalty, and share the assessment of other participating States that this will be used as an enhanced instrument of political repression. We oppose the death penalty in all circumstances, as a matter of principle. While much of the world is moving towards abolition of the death penalty, the Lukashenko regime takes a clear step back. We urge Belarus to reconsider this action.

We commend the tireless work of civil society organisations and human rights defenders in Belarus, despite the very real dangers they face in conducting their vital work. We once again call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Belarus.

In their reply under the [Vienna Mechanism](#), the Delegation of Belarus stated there is no such concept as "a political prisoner" under Belarusian legislation. However, that does not mean an absence of political prisoners in Belarus; we now know that there are close to 1200 people detained for politically motivated reasons such as peacefully exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association. There is further evidence that detainees are faced with torture, cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. We will defend these fundamental freedoms of the Belarusian people and work with others in a network of liberty to hold those who seek to silence them to account.

We urge the Belarusian authorities to fully implement their international obligations and OSCE commitments, and to make use of the OSCE's tools and mechanisms to help resolve the continuing crisis in Belarus.

Thank you Mr Chair