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**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT ON BELARUS

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 26 January 2012

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

This statement is delivered on behalf of Canada and Norway.

We share the concerns expressed by previous speakers, as well as by the Chairman-in-Office, about the rejection on 24 January of Mr Ales Byalyatski's appeal to the Minsk City Court against his four-and-a-half-year prison sentence for alleged concealment of tax and income evasion.

The trial against Mr. Byalyatski has been followed very closely in our countries, including by human rights organisations. This Tuesday's decision to reject his appeal has caused great concern and regret. We believe there are strong indications that the prosecution of Mr. Byalyatski is politically motivated, and consider the sentence against him to be a violation of fundamental human rights.

We reiterate our appeal to Belarus to abide by its OSCE commitments and other international obligations in the field of human rights, and to stop the harassment and persecution of human rights defenders.

As a response to the Belarusian authorities' repression of its own population, we will continue to support Belarusian civil society and other democratic forces in the country.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.