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PC.DEL/689/23

19 May 2023

ENGLISH

Original: as delivered

Delegation of Canada

**STATEMENT BY
AMBASSADOR JOCELYN KINNEAR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
CANADA TO THE OSCE, AT THE 1422nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 May 2023

On the Moscow Mechanism invoked by 38 OSCE participating States in relation to particularly serious threats to the fulfilment of the provisions of the OSCE human dimension by the Republic of Belarus

Mr. Chairperson,

Canada fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by Denmark and wishes to add the following remarks in a national capacity. I shall also contribute to the linguistic diversity of our meeting today.

I join the other speakers in welcoming Professor Ascensio to the Permanent Council and thanking him for his comprehensive report. We greatly appreciate the professionalism and diligence he has demonstrated in drafting this report.

I should also like to thank the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for its ongoing technical support in the drafting of this and other Moscow Mechanism reports.

Mr. Chairperson,

Canada is deeply concerned by the events that have taken place in Belarus since the fraudulent presidential election in 2020. Like many others sitting around this table, we have condemned the initial and continuing violence and intimidation aimed at peaceful demonstrators, journalists, defenders of civil society and human rights, and opposition leaders. We have called for the release of all political prisoners and for dialogue that respects the will and human rights of the Belarusian people.

We have also taken specific measures to support the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people by imposing sanctions on those responsible for this repression.

But we also realize that more must be done. That is why on 23 March Canada joined 37 other participating States in invoking the Moscow Mechanism in relation to Belarus for a second time. This mechanism is an invaluable tool in the OSCE's toolkit enabling an independent expert to investigate and report on human dimension concerns.

In fact, as Professor Ascensio has pointed out, this report is based on the conclusions of the Moscow Mechanism invoked in 2020. Unfortunately, no improvement in the situation in Belarus has been observed during the past two and a half years. The report confirms that the people of Belarus continue to suffer brutal repression and human rights violations at the hands of their own Government. Far from improving, the situation has deteriorated.

Mr. Chair,

I will continue in English.

The Report highlights that the Belarusian authorities have adopted a series of legislative reforms since December 2020 that aim to stifle any form of dissent or opposition. These reforms introduce new criminal and administrative offences, increase penalties for vaguely defined acts, extend the death penalty, restrict political rights, limit freedoms of assembly, association, and expression, and impact the entire Belarusian population. The report also recognises that waves of arrests have swept up Belarus' opposition or forced them into hiding.

As Professor Ascensio has aptly summarized: "The Belarusian government now has a full arsenal of legislation designed to hinder any form of opposition."

These so-called reforms have resulted in an increased number of political prisoners in Belarus. The Rapporteur has assessed that the list compiled by Viasna is highly reliable. As of 10 May 2023, that list shows that there are, at least, 1,493 political prisoners being held in Belarus. Canada reiterates our deep concern for political prisoners in Belarus, who, as highlighted in this report, face not only the loss of their liberty, but also torture, mistreatment, sexual violence, and severe difficulties in obtaining basic medical care.

For example, we have the recent case of Viktor Babaryka, who ran against Alexander Lukashenko in the 2020 presidential election, was sentenced to a fourteen-year prison sentence on politically motivated charges, and who was hospitalized at the end of April with a punctured lung and signs of physical abuse. Another tragic example is the recent prison death, under suspicious circumstances, of Belarusian blogger Mikalay Klimovich, imprisoned for posting a caricature of Lukashenko.

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which was partly launched from the territory of Belarus, the repression of the Lukashenko regime has been particularly directed at those expressing their opposition to the war or their support for the Ukrainian people.

This situation is beyond unacceptable. This is a serious failure by Belarus to fulfill the OSCE commitments and international obligations that it has voluntarily accepted. This is an affront to the values that we share as members of this organization.

Canada calls on the Belarusian authorities to implement the recommendations of the rapporteur and to:

- Repeal or amend the legislative reforms that violate human rights;
- Release all political prisoners;
- Ensure that all those in detention have access to necessary medical care, access to lawyers and communications with their families;

- End all forms of violence, harassment, and intimidation against peaceful protesters and civil society;
- Hold free and fair elections under international observation.

We also strongly encourage the government in Belarus to seriously consider the rationale behind the rapporteur's recommendations on taking measures to preserve the Belarusian language, literature, and other cultural practices.

The people of Belarus deserve their own independent, democratic nation, with independent media, free of interference from and subservience to Russia.

Canada believes in this future for Belarus, and we stand with the Belarusian people in their fight for democracy, for freedom and for human rights.

Thank you.