



PRESS RELEASE

# Deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus of utmost concern as crackdown continues, human rights office ODIHR says

WARSAW, 21 February 2024 – The human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate as those who voice dissent or stand up for the human rights of others are subject to investigation, persecution, and frequently prosecution, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) said in a statement today.

“Human rights work can include criticism of the government and contributes to the wellbeing of any society. It is regrettable to see that this work has now been criminalized in Belarus,” said ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci. “Many human rights defenders, activists and ordinary citizens voicing their dissent have been convicted, imprisoned and harassed. We call once again on the Belarusian authorities to respect the rights of human rights defenders and of all citizens, as the health and even life of these citizens and of their families is at stake.”

Since 2020, dozens of human rights defenders including independent journalists and citizen election observers have been arbitrarily detained, some multiple times, and many remain imprisoned in deplorable conditions, without the right to a fair trial being respected. Hundreds of civil society organizations have been ordered to shut down or decided to cease their work amid intimidation, raids or confiscation of property.

ODIHR is gravely concerned at the continued arrests of people merely for participating in the peaceful demonstrations of 2020-2021, or for interacting with social media content critical of the official line of the national authorities. The Office reiterates its call for the release of all citizens who have been detained unjustly.

The human rights situation has resulted in the flight of thousands of Belarusians to safety abroad, including many members of civil society and the political opposition. Recent changes to Belarusian legislation mean that some may even be arbitrarily deprived of citizenship and made stateless as a punishment for poorly defined “extremist activity”, which goes against international human rights law.

ODIHR reminds the Belarusian authorities of their international obligations and OSCE commitments to [respect human rights and the rule of law](#), and to [ensure accountability](#) for human rights violations. ODIHR has reiterated its offer on many occasions to assist in this process by monitoring the trials of human rights defenders together with the Office’s other [expertise and tools](#) to protect the rights of all citizens.

Particularly given this context, ODIHR [deeply regrets the decision](#) of the Belarusian authorities not to issue an invitation to observe this weekend’s parliamentary elections, depriving the country’s citizens

and institutions from an impartial, transparent, and comprehensive assessment by an international body. ODIHR also reiterates the importance of citizen election observers and their ability to work free from intimidation or pressure. While the Office is unable to observe the elections, ODIHR continues to follow closely the events in Belarus and their consequences for democracy and human rights from all the areas covered by its mandate.

For PDF attachments or links to sources of further information, please visit:

<https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/563046>

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