

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
14 September 2020

Original: English

Letter dated 14 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the Chair's summary of the open Arria-formula meeting of the Security Council on the theme "Human rights in Belarus", which was held on 4 September 2020 (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Sven Jürgenson**
Ambassador, Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 14 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Chair's summary of the open Arria-formula meeting of the Security Council on human rights in Belarus, held on 4 September 2020

Introduction

On 4 September 2020, the Security Council members Estonia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America together with additional co-sponsors Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Ukraine hosted an informal online briefing of the Security Council on the situation in Belarus. The debate was chaired by Urmas Reinsalu, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia.

The briefers were the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Anaïs Marin; the former presidential candidate of Belarus, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya; the Vice-Chairman of the Viasna Human Rights Centre, Valiantsin Stefanovic; and a legal expert for the Belarusian Association of Journalists, Volha Siakhovich. Representatives of all Member States were invited to attend and to make statements. Following the briefings, 32 Member States made statements, including nine Security Council members. Nine Member States were represented at the ministerial level.

The Arria-formula meeting was aimed at drawing the attention of the Security Council members and other Member States to the serious human rights violations in Belarus. The Security Council has a key responsibility in the prevention of violent conflict and atrocity crimes. The Security Council has stated that severe human rights violations are an early indicator of conflict with international implications, and that repression could amount to threats to international peace and security; therefore early warning and awareness-raising are important.

Briefings

The briefers emphasized the gravity of the human rights situation in Belarus. The developments, which are unprecedented in Belarus, require the renewed attention of the international community and of the United Nations, as there is a great risk that a spiral of violence could threaten regional peace and security. The United Nations was urged to send an international monitoring mission to Belarus in order to document the situation on the ground. The briefers highlighted the issues that have been most concerning and serious in Belarus. The electoral process has demonstrated how the authorities of Belarus limit the right of citizens to participate in public life. The President and his supporters have been refusing to engage in dialogue, which would be the only way to reconcile the people with their authorities. The rule of law has not been respected. The response of law enforcement agencies to peaceful protesters has been violent and disproportionate. Cutting off Internet access is disproportionate and incompatible with the right to freedom of speech. The briefers also described the situation of journalists in Belarus, emphasizing that journalists and bloggers were prime targets of repressions and were prosecuted for allegedly organizing or coordinating unauthorized demonstrations.

Debate

Almost all of the participants condemned the violence perpetrated against peaceful protesters in the post-election period in Belarus. They shared the concerns raised by the United Nations, including by the Secretary-General, working groups and special rapporteurs. They encouraged the United Nations to continue monitoring the situation in Belarus and stressed that the Security Council must be kept informed of the developments in Belarus. The role of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), both in facilitating a dialogue in Belarus and in proposing a visit of the current and incoming chairpersons-in-office to Belarus, was widely supported by most of the Member States. It was emphasized that violence by the Belarusian authorities and restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms were unacceptable and must stop. All political prisoners, including members of the Coordination Council, activists, human rights defenders and journalists, must be released immediately and unconditionally. A thorough and independent investigation into the serious human rights violations to ensure accountability was called for, and the Belarusian authorities were invited to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus. It was reaffirmed that the crisis in Belarus can be resolved only through peaceful and inclusive national dialogue, and it was necessary to support independent media, human rights organizations and community groups in Belarus. It was also stressed that geopolitics had no role in the concerns that were raised, as the international community was merely asking the Belarusian State to meet its obligation to protect the rights of its own people.

Three Member States rejected the meeting, which in their view had nothing to do with the agenda of the Security Council. Those Member States considered the situation in Belarus an internal matter of Belarus and called for stopping foreign interference in the internal affairs of Belarus. In their view, the current crisis had stemmed from the opposition's incapacity to accept defeat. One Member State stressed that the United Nations has its ad hoc human rights bodies to discuss such agenda items.

Conclusion

There was a broad consensus that the developments in Belarus require the attention of the international community and of the United Nations. Briefers, as well as most of the participants, repeated their concern over the serious human rights violations in Belarus, including the unlawful detention and torture of peaceful protesters.

Recommendations from the meeting

- Call for an immediate end to violence and the violations of fundamental rights and for the release of all the political prisoners, journalists, human rights defenders and activists without any delay and without any preconditions.
- Call for the establishment of an independent international mechanism to investigate the serious crimes that have been committed and encourage the Belarusian authorities to cooperate with it.
- Call for supporting the mandate of Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus and ensuring access to the country.
- Call for a peaceful and inclusive national dialogue.
- Support fully the role of OSCE. The proposal of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE to help facilitate a political dialogue within Belarus, as well as the visit

of the current and incoming chairpersons-in-office of the OSCE to Belarus was endorsed.

- Call for convening a special session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.
 - Urge the United Nations to send an international monitoring mission to Belarus to document the situation on the ground.
 - Call for continuing to monitor the developments in Belarus closely. The Security Council must be kept informed about the developments in Belarus.
-