



BELARUS 2022 – 2023.
HUMAN RIGHTS.
CIVIL SOCIETY.
MASS MEDIA.



The Belarusian Association of Journalists

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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION AND PRESSURE ON CIVIL SOCIETY. REVIEW

Situation in the Field of Human Rights

Repressions against the political opposition, civil society and the media do not stop in the country, despite the fact that more than three years have passed since the presidential elections in Belarus and the suppression of mass protests caused by their falsification and the use of violence against protesters. The human rights situation in Belarus has further deteriorated after the beginning of full-scale military aggression of Russia against Ukraine, supported by the Belarusian authorities.

It was reflected in reports and indexes of international organizations and structures. Thus, in particular, Belarus dropped by four points in the [2023 Press Freedom Index](#), published by Reporters without Borders on May 3, 2023, holding the 157th position in the list of 180 countries.

At the same time, as it was stated in [Resolution No.59](#) of the first UN Session back in the year of 1946, freedom of information is a fundamental human right. It represents the benchmark of all freedoms that the United Nations is committed to protecting. The situation in Belarus proves this.

The UN High Commissioner on Human Rights concluded in his [report](#) on the Situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath, presented on 3 February 2023, that “systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed in Belarus.”

Among other, the following violations were outlined in this report:

- Unnecessary and disproportionate use of force;
- Torture and other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment;
- Arbitrary arrest and detention;
- Rights to due process and a fair trial;
- Freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association;
- Sexual and gender-based violence;
- Child separation and undue interference in family life;
- Forced exile.

The UN High Commissioner [noted](#) in his report that according to official statistics, more than 11,000 criminal cases related to extremism were filed by the Belarusian authorities within the period from August 2020 till July 2022. *“The authorities applied the concept of “extremist formations” to target hundreds of social media groups and channels and private chats. Most independent Belarusian media outlets are considered “extremist” by the authorities, including hundreds of social media channels and blogs. OHCHR found that such an expansive concept of “extremism” was incompatible with the principle of legality and that domestic extremism and counter-terrorism laws were used to suppress dissent.”*

Anaïs Marin, the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus presented her [report](#) on the Situation of human rights in Belarus on May 3, 2023. She drew public attention (par. 108) to further amendments to the already restrictive domestic legislation on human rights. The Special Rapporteur expressed regret (par. 3) that the Belarusian government [withdrew](#) from the first Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Apparently, it was the last international legal document giving the right to Belarusian citizens to challenge violations of their civil and political rights by the Belarusian government in supranational courts.

Moreover, she stood up against the policies of Belarusian authorities, aimed at eliminating civil space in the country, and the constantly increasing number of people, who are sentenced on politically motivated charges:

“The environment of impunity for human rights violations and fear has led the political opposition, civic activists, intellectuals, and many ordinary people into exile.”

The “Viasna” Human Rights Center, whose leaders have been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment (including [Ales Bialatski](#), 2022 Nobel Peace Prize winner), notes that [a deep human rights crisis](#) continues to determine the situation in Belarus. According to “Viasna”, there were registered 1,490 political prisoners in prison in Belarus at the end of September 2023. At the same time, about 1,200 [political prisoners](#) have been set free since 2020 due to the completion of their prison terms, changes in preventive measures, imposition of non-custodial sentences, or due to pardons.

A sociologist [Henadz Korshunau](#), former director of the Institute of Sociology at the national Academy of Sciences of Belarus says that the repressions have reached *“some kind of plateau”*. According to him, first of all *“such thoughts come to his mind due to the observation of monthly dynamics of the number of political prisoners. Their number has fluctuated at +/- 1,500 people for five months since April 2023. This means that the number of people, who are sent to prison and the number of people, who are released from places of detention is the same. [...] Another factor is determined by the dynamics of detentions for political reasons, which are known to the public [...] If we talk about average values, around 365-370 people were detained per month over the last 12 months and around 360 – 365 people were detained per month over the last 8 months. The third point is the monthly number of people convicted for political reasons [...]”*. Moreover, he has emphasized that the dynamics of adding people to the so-called “list of extremists” demonstrates a fairly clear bar - +/- 100 people per month (115 people per month on average during 8 months of the current year). At the same time, it is

not possible to count on a decrease in repressive pressure, since the official position of the authorities that is articulated by security forces at various levels is as follows: ***“The repressions will not stop!”***

[The Belarusian Helsinki Committee](#) draws public attention to such trends in the first half-year 2023 as [the application](#) of incommunicado methods (deprivation of communication) in relation to a number of public political prisoners, the first publicly known open criminal prosecution of a lawyer for providing legal assistance to his clients, the first sentences in absentia (trials in absentia), the first sentence for ***“Belarusian nationalism.”***

Pressure on civil society

The Belarusian authorities are systematically and purposefully implementing plans to purge civil society and the media. The intentions have been regularly articulated by Aliaksandr Lukashenka since the fall of 2020.

Thus, during another personnel meeting on October 20, 2020, he [promised](#) to find and punish all protesters: ***“We will calmly find everyone. Modern techniques allow us to do this, and we are dealing with all this by the way. And everyone will answer for their actions. I’m not threatening here. We are working in this direction. And it brings certain results.”***

In November 2021, a British journalist for BBC News Stephen Rosenberg noted during an interview with Aliaksandr Lukashenka that 270 NGOs had recently been liquidated in Belarus¹. Lukashenka [responded](#), ***“We’ll massacre all the scum that you [the West] have been financing. Oh, you’re upset we’ve destroyed all your structures! Your NGOs, whatever they are, that you’ve been paying for. We didn’t touch people who worked for the good of Belarus, who helped people. But the people who used your assistance, got funding from you and smashed up everything here... your people you saw here in Minsk. If we haven’t liquidated them already, we will do so in the near future.”***

However, the organizations that had nothing to do with human rights or social activities, e.g., protecting animal rights, bird watching, cycling societies, etc., were also purged. And the majority of targeted organizations was of this kind.

The UN High Commissioner on Human Rights noted in his [report](#) that ***“by December 2022, the number of liquidated non-governmental organizations reached 757, and 416 organizations made the difficult decision to close in order to avoid potential criminal prosecution. These statistics include virtually all human rights groups working in the country. Since January 2022, an amendment to the Criminal Code provides that a person taking part in activities of an unregistered organization or one that has been liquidated, faces a sentence of two years’ imprisonment.”***

¹ Including the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ)

The **“Lawtrend” NGO** has noted that the number of liquidated non-profit organizations continues to grow in Belarus. As of the end of August 2023, at least 900 non-profit organizations were in the process of forced liquidation or forcibly excluded from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs (USR). The number of organizations that decided to terminate their activity amounted to no less than 507 legal entities at the end of August. The liquidation of political parties continued. *“Thus, the losses in the public sector of Belarus, starting from the post-election period of 2020, amount to no less than 1,407 institutionalized forms of non-profit organizations (public associations, trade unions, political parties, foundations, non-governmental institutions and associations).”*

The **Belarusian Helsinki Committee** regards the ongoing processes as “nationalization” of civil society: *“Actually, the state has formally secured the right to “appoint” those, who will be considered to be the civil society nowadays.”*

Moreover, the BHC outlined the following trends in governmental policy in this area:

- reproduction of unlawful practices of security forces by pro-government civil institutions (“**Carte blanche for violence, irresponsibly given by the state to security forces in August 2020, has, among other, another dangerous effect, which is the corruption of society in terms of the lack of restrictions. Namely, impunity for violence, if it is used for the sake of meeting the “politically correct”, pro-governmental goals**”);
- prosecution for financial donations to funds that help victims of repression.

The latter trend was also highlighted by “Lawtrend” NGO: *“There is the endless line of people being summoned to the KGB for allegedly financing extremist groups by means of transferring even tiny amounts of online donations.”*

SITUATION IN MASS MEDIA FIELD

The suppression of freedom of speech and the fight against dissent, including censorship and repressions against journalists, continued in Belarus in 2022 - 2023.

An important factor that left its mark on the governmental policy was the full-scale aggression of Russia against Ukraine (since February 24, 2022), supported by the Belarusian authorities. Apart from suppressing the dissemination of information about the political and legal situation in Belarus, the government started to suppress distribution of anti-war statements and objective information about the reasons and the course of military activities in Ukraine, if the updates differed from the official point of view.

The information space of Belarus was under the control of both law enforcement agencies and the Ministry of Information, which carried out censorship through administrative means.

The measures were accompanied by tightening the FoE legislation at the systemic level.

Numerous [changes](#) were made to the Constitution of Belarus at the so-called referendum on February 27, 2022. They further upset the balance of power. (However, the system of checks and balances had been destroyed back in 1996). Thus, the concept of “ideology of the Belarusian state” was introduced into Article 4, despite the prohibition on establishing the ideology of political parties, religious or other public associations, and social groups as obligatory for citizens, which can be found in the same [article](#).

Article 54 of the Constitution was supplemented with Part 2: “Preserving the historical memory of the heroic past of the Belarusian people and patriotism are the duty of every citizen of the Republic of Belarus,” which essentially limits freedom of opinion regarding historical events and should be considered in the context of [the law](#) “On the Genocide of the Belarusian people” adopted on January 5, 2022, which introduced criminal liability for public denial of the official interpretation of historical events of 1941-1951 (Article 130-2 of the Criminal Code “Denial of the Genocide of the Belarusian people”), providing for the penalty of up to 10 years in prison.

These legislative innovations make a violation of international standards of freedom of expression.

On July 1, 2023, changes were made to the law “On Mass Media”, which were justified by the need for “an adequate response to destructive processes in the media space” and further limited the activities of the press. In particular, they introduced certain requirements for the operation of news aggregators. (Among other things, the amendments provided for the possibility of blocking the Web-aggregators for distributing the content of the blocked Websites.) The list of grounds for depriving media outlets of official registration and restricting access to Web-resources was expanded. Also, the authorities introduced the possibility of using symmetrical measures in response to “anti-Belarusian” attacks by foreign media and journalists etc.

Almost all major independent information resources continued to function from abroad. Some media outlets experienced repeated relocation after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The Belarusian Association of Journalists also continued its work, being in exile.

In 2022, the Belarusian Association of Journalists [won](#) the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Prize for its contribution to press freedom.

Repression against journalists and media specialists

Criminal prosecution

According to the '[Reporters Without Borders](#)' international non-governmental organization, Belarus is at the bottom of the [top five countries](#) of the world with the largest number of journalists behind bars (31 people at the moment of compiling the report) and holds the 4th position as for the number of imprisoned female journalists (9) in the country.

[17 sentences](#) were passed in criminal cases against journalists and other media workers during the year of 2022. The longest sentence of 14 years in the colony was announced to Andrei Aliaksandrau, who was charged with his colleagues within the 'BelaPAN case'.

The top managers of TUT.by news portal Maryna Zolatava and Liudmila Chekina were each sentenced to 12 years in prison. A 'Belsat' journalist Katsiaryna Andreyeva, who was sentenced to two years in prison in 2020, was also convicted of 'high treason' (Article 356 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced additionally to eight years of imprisonment, on top of the initial prison term. [Sentences](#) on criminal charges were pronounced to 15 journalists in January - September 2023.

In 2022, the authorities began to announce charges to political emigrants, including opposition bloggers, in absentia. The procedure was applied subject to the introduction of the institution of "special proceedings", due to a new Article 468-27 of the Criminal Procedure Code, i.e. criminal proceedings against the accused people who are located outside of Belarus.

The first conviction in absentia was initiated within a criminal case under Article 130 ('incitement of hatred') and Article 203-1 ('illegal collection and distribution of personal data') against five 'administrators' of the Black Book of Belarus Telegram channel, which published information about government officials who were accused of persecuting the opposition. Dzmitry Navosha, a public figure, a journalist, and a co-founder of Sports.ru Website was among the convicted people. On January 18, 2023, all defendants were each [sentenced in absentia](#) to 12 years in prison.

On May 3, a [verdict](#) was pronounced in a criminal case against well-known bloggers, who edited the Nexta and 'Belarus of the Brain' Telegram channels. Stsiapan Putsila was sentenced to 20 years in a maximum-security colony, and Yan Rudzik was sentenced to 19 years in prison. The case was considered in absentia within the special procedure. Raman

Pratasevich, who collaborated with the investigation, was sentenced to 8 years in a maximum-security colony. He was [pardoned](#) by Aliaksandr Lukashenka later.

The imprisoned journalists were subjected to pressure and inhumane treatment in the colonies. It was reported that Siarhei Satsuk, Dzianis Ivashyn, and Andrzej Poczobut faced problems obtaining [medicines](#) and access to qualified medical care.

According to human rights defenders, a journalist [Ihar Losik](#) went on a hunger strike for a long period of time, and then cut his hands and neck in the Navapolatsk colony. Consequently, he was sent to the prison hospital.

A blogger from Pinsk [Mikalai Klimovich](#), 61, died in Vitsebsk Colony No. 3 on May 7, 2023. At the end of February he was sentenced to one year in prison on charges of 'insulting the President of the Republic of Belarus' despite the fact that the court was aware of a very serious heart condition he had.

Detentions and searches

In 2022, the BAI [registered](#) **43 cases of detention of journalists and 55 searches**. Also, the journalists were fined four times and **sentenced 20 times** to different terms of administrative arrest.

Since the beginning of 2023, 26 [searches](#) have been carried out in journalists' houses and editorial offices. Also, there have been registered 35 cases of detention and 14 cases of administrative arrest of journalists in the country. Moreover, representatives of law enforcement agencies summoned journalists for questioning, visited relatives and searched the homes of journalists, including those who had left Belarus. Thus, starting from 2020, the police paid six visits to journalist [Anatol Hatouchyts](#) from Homiel. Four of these visits were accompanied by a search and seizure of equipment.

Since 2020, the total number of attacks on journalists has been decreasing from year to year. This happened since there remained fewer and fewer active journalists in the country. This process is called 'Turkmenization'.

During 2022-2023, the authorities purposefully liquidated independent regional media that were still functioning in the country. The pressure on these publications was of a complex nature. It included interrogations, cases of detention and administrative prosecution of employees, seizure of equipment, refusal to distribute content, defamation in pro-government media, and, finally, the almost simultaneous recognition of their content as 'extremist materials.'

As a result of this policy, the number of non-state printed publications registered by the [Ministry of Information](#) of Belarus decreased significantly from 764 to 560 media outlets in 2022. At the same time, the number of state-owned media changed from 414 to 403. Almost all of the remaining registered media in Belarus either follow the governmental media policy or avoid political topics (including the war in Ukraine) or resort to self-censorship.

The use of anti-extremist legislation to suppress freedom of speech

The use of anti-extremist legislation was the main tool of prosecution for the publication of “undesirable” information and, more broadly, for any manifestations of disloyalty. First of all, it was used as the grounds for blocking access to online media and prosecuting people for the dissemination of information.

During 2022, the publications of about 1,500 Web resources (mainly Telegram channels and online communities) were recognized by the courts as “extremist materials”, and more than a hundred of them were labeled as “extremist formations”.

As before, it entailed mass administrative prosecution of Web-users for the dissemination of “extremist” media content (in particular, under Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, which provides for up to 15 days of administrative arrest). The application of this article was peculiar enough, since the authorities presented administrative charges to people for reposts of materials, which had been published many years earlier and which weren't included in the list of extremist materials at the moment of their distribution.

Since 2023, the authorities started labeling as ‘extremist materials’ not only online content, but also publications in print media and personal pages with critical materials on social media, some of which were published decades ago (e.g., a social media account, established by a journalist Ruslan Kulevich from Bialystok).

Since the beginning of 2023, there has been registered a dramatic increase in the number of administrative cases for dissemination of ‘extremist materials.’ Thus, in the first half of the year it increased by 1.7 times compared to the same period in 2022 (at least 1,274 cases against 721). Since almost all leading media resources have been “banned” without taking into account the age of publications, almost every person can be held accountable under Article 19.11 of Belarus Code of Administrative Offences.

Eighteen media outlets, including ‘Belsat’, ‘BelaPAN’, ‘Euroradio’, ‘TUT.BY’, ‘KYKY.ORG’, ‘Nasha Niva’, ‘Radio Liberty’, ‘Charter’97’, ‘Flagstock’, ‘Hrodna.life’, ‘Volkovysk.by’, ‘Malanka Media’, ‘Bobruysk Online’, ‘Brestskaya Gazeta’, ‘SAMOE’, ‘Zerkalo’, ‘MOST’, ‘Ranak’ as well as the Belarusian Association of Journalists and the Belarusian Investigative Center were labeled as “extremist formations” or “extremist organizations” in 2022 - 2023. The appearance of foreign media among “extremist formations” has become a new phenomenon in 2023. These are the Telegram, YouTube and TikTok accounts of the popular Ukrainian blogger Alexander Rykov (BalaganOff). He pays significant attention to Belarusian issues in his videos.

A number of employees of media organizations recognized as “extremist formations” were convicted under Article 361-1 of the Criminal Code (“creation of an extremist formation or participation in it”), which envisages the sanction of up to 10 years in prison and is actually retroactive.

In 2022, the authorities started [criminal prosecution](#) of ordinary citizens for any form of cooperation with Internet resources recognized as “extremist formations”.

Providing any information, giving interviews etc. became the basis for filing cases under Article 361-4 of the Criminal Code (“facilitation of extremist activities”) that envisaged a punishment of up to seven years in prison. [Daria Losik](#), the wife of Radio Liberty employee Ihar Losik was sentenced to two years of imprisonment in January 2023 for being interviewed by the Belsat TV channel about the situation of her husband in jail. At the same time, their four-year-old daughter was placed under the care of relatives.

[The first criminal case](#) under the new “extremist” Article 130-2 (“denial of the genocide of the Belarusian people”), included in the Criminal Code in 2022, was initiated in connection with publications in independent media - “Flagstock” (Homiel) and “Zerkalo” – about burial sites of victims of Stalinist repressions, which, according to the prosecutor’s office, are the graves of people killed by the Nazis.

[The List](#) of citizens of the Republic of Belarus, foreign citizens or stateless persons involved in extremist activities was first published on March 23, 2022. 19 journalists and a number of popular bloggers were included into the list later on.

Moreover, the KGB [mentioned](#) 7 media representatives, including a journalist and one of the leaders of the Union of Poles in Belarus Andrzej Poczobut as well as four former employees of TUT.BY in the list of “individuals involved in terrorist activities”.

Restriction of access to information

Censorship and restriction of access to Websites

Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has led to the situation, when censorship began to affect not only the Belarusian media content, but also the content of foreign media. Shortly after the beginning of the war, access to 6 Ukrainian news Websites was blocked on the territory of Belarus, including “Gordon”, “Observer”, RBC-Ukraine, InfoResist, “Novoe Vremya”, and “Focus”, due to the fact that they covered the military conflict in Ukraine in a way that was distinct from the official interpretation of Russian-Belarusian propaganda.

The blocking of Russian users’ access to Belarusian independent media for the same reasons became a new phenomenon in 2022. By decisions of the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media, abbreviated as [Roskomnadzor](#), or the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation, a number of news Websites ([Zerkalo.io](#), “Nasha Niva”, “Euroradio”, [“Media-Palessie”](#), [“Solidarnasts”](#) and others) as well as the Website of the Belarusian Association of Journalists [were blocked](#) on the territory of the country.

The VKontakte social network (Russia) blocked access to a number of pages and groups of Belarusian independent media “Charter-97” and “Flagstock” in response to a complaint from the Ministry of Information of Belarus. Also, it

blocked public access to the pages and groups of “Zerkalo” and “Mediazone Belarus” at the request of the Russian Prosecutor General’s Office.

According to official data, the government restricted access, in whole or in part, to 3,002 Web resources (mainly Telegram channels and chats) in January – November 2022. At the same time, just over 5,000 resources had been subject to such restrictions over the previous seven years.

Quite a few media outlets that continued to operate in Belarus were subject to temporary blocking in accordance with decisions of the Ministry of Information. The condition for restoring access was the removal of certain content. Thus, the Blizko.by news website about Minsk and Belarus was temporarily blocked by decision of the Ministry of Information due to mentioning a blogger Anton Matolka in one of publications on the Web-resource. The latter was included in the list of “terrorists” some time ago. When the authorities restored public access to the Web-resource, none of political news publications could be found on its pages, including the archival ones.

Increasing ideologization of state media activities

The ideologization of state media activities continued alongside their reorientation towards purely propaganda work. The “hybrid war” that is allegedly being waged against Belarus and Russia was constantly mentioned at the official level, also in the context of events in Ukraine.

On March 25, 2022, Aliaksandr Lukashenka stated during a meeting on mass media activities that “advertising should appear on patriotic pro-governmental (not from the point of view of ownership) channels that protect the state.” On March 31, 2022, Presidential Decree No. 131 “On the Development of Mass Media” was signed. It established an advertising fee of 10% for outdoor ads as well as for advertising on public transport. In other cases, the fee amounted to 20% of the cost of advertising distribution services. The fee is supposed to be paid by advertisers and the raised funds are to be used to subsidize the state media.

Since 2023, enrollment of students at the Faculty of Journalism of the Belarusian State University has been reduced by 20%, and the paid studies with self-employment have been canceled. As Dean Aliaksey Bialayeu explained, the department is busy fulfilling the government orders, preparing “combat bayonet warriors” for the state media.

At the same time, political purges of state media workers continued. Thus, at the end of 2022, 8 employees were fired at Homiel Regional Television and the TV channel management was replaced.

Since Belarus has been internationally regarded as an aggressor country in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, additional sanctions were introduced against Belarusian state media. Thus, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) excluded the Belarusian TV and Radio company from the list of official broadcasters of the League of Nations. Consequently, the matches of the national football team could no longer be watched on the Belarus 5 TV channel. The

[Belarusian TV and Radio Company](#) was also excluded from the list of broadcasters of Olympic games for the coming 10 years.

[Ukraine](#) and the [European Union](#) introduced sanctions against certain Belarusian propagandists.

ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Independent mass media and civil society respond to pressure and repressions with solidarity and mutual support. Thus, the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) [arranged](#) the international Marathon of [Solidarity](#) with the imprisoned journalists and took part in “We Care!” online charity marathon in support of political prisoners, arranged by influential independent media and bloggers. The organizers [collected](#) more than EUR 574,000 for the politically repressed people during the action.

Among other goals, these actions are aimed at keeping the current situation with political prisoners, human rights, and, particularly, freedom of speech violations in Belarus in the focus of attention of the international community. The outcome of these actions is reflected in resolutions and recommendations of international organizations and structures.

Thus, among other, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus [recommends](#) the government of Belarus in her report (par.111):

- to repeal the denunciation of and re-accede to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights without delay;
- to introduce a moratorium on the death penalty without delay and ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty;
- to put an end to the policy of systematic repression of civil society organizations and human rights defenders
- to ensure in law and in practice the right to freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association and ensure that any limitation on those rights is in accordance with international law;
- to revoke all the decisions on the dissolution of independent media and civil society organizations, including those working in the area of economic, social and cultural rights, and bring the legislation regulating the registration of civil society organizations and the media into alignment with international human rights law;
- to release all prisoners sentenced on politically motivated grounds, starting immediately with the release of persons whose health and life are endangered;
- to provide unrestricted access for independent monitors to all places of detention;

- to ensure that international fair trial standards are met, notably by ensuring that all defendants are given unhindered access to legal counsel of their choosing and are presumed innocent until proven otherwise by an independent court decision;
- to ensure the prompt, transparent and effective investigation by an independent and impartial body into all cases of death in custody and reports of torture and other ill-treatment and prosecute and hold accountable public officials, including law enforcement officials, found responsible for issuing or carrying out such illegal orders;
- to take comprehensive measures to end repression and fear and reverse the trend of the mass exile of Belarusians from their country.

Moreover, the Special Rapporteur addressed recommendations to the international community (par.112), in particular, calling:

- to continue to demand that Belarus comply with its international human rights obligations;
- to support individuals forced into exile and civil society organizations that have had to relocate outside of Belarus;
- to continue to expand support for the critical work of journalists, civil society actors and human rights defenders;
- to encourage Member States to share and learn from best practices for supporting Belarusian students, educators and researchers who have fled Belarus for fear of further repression.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [addressed](#) the government of Belarus in his report with an appeal to stop human rights violations. Moreover, he recommended the UN Member States to work on bringing the human rights abusers to legal accountability through proceedings in national courts based on generally accepted principles of extraterritorial and universal jurisdiction, as appropriate, and in accordance with international law, while also exploring further targeted measures against those alleged to be responsible for serious violations of human rights. Also, he encouraged the Member States to keep the human rights situation in Belarus under the control of the Human Rights Council and, if necessary, consider other mechanisms of bringing the human rights violators to legal accountability in line with the Council's practice.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists has repeatedly drawn the attention of the Belarusian authorities to the fact that journalists are not criminals, and that there cannot be a free society without the free press. BAJ demands that the Belarusian authorities set our colleagues free and calls on journalist, human rights, and humanitarian organizations around the world as well as well-known public figures to use their authority to influence the release of unjustly convicted people in Belarus from prison.

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