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Written statement* submitted by Women's Federation for World Peace International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.


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The Treatment of Women during the Presidential Elections in Belarus

Presidential elections in Belarus took place between August 4-9, with 5 days of pre-term voting and the main voting on August 9th.

The overall turnover during the pre-term voting was 32,24%, in Gomel region even 42,72%¹. According to the statements of some independent observers located outside of polling stations, the number of people visiting the polling stations during the pre-term period was much lower². Overall turnover was 84,23%, although thousands of those standing in huge lines to the polling stations on August 9th, could not vote as all the majority of the polling stations stopped their work at 8 pm, although at some stations working hours were prolonged in order to accommodate all willing to vote.

There were no independent exit polls neither during the pre-term voting, nor on the main day of the elections.

Independent observers very often were not allowed into the polling stations both during the voting and counting of the voting ballots. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe did not send observation missions, the former because of the COVID-19 pandemics, the latter due to the late arrival of the invitation from the Belarusian government, Russian electoral Commission did not send its representatives. As Belarusian Central Electoral Commission limited the number of local observers due to the COVID-19 pandemics, mostly observers from the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of States members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and representatives of pro-governmental organizations were present.

The final official results announced by the Central Electoral Commission on August 14th are as follows: 80,1% of voters voted for the current Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, 10,1% for non-partisan candidate Svetlana Tikanovskaya. Meanwhile, some local electoral commissions counted the ballots in the presence of independent observers and even video recorded the counting process. The voting results in those polling stations were exactly the opposite. Presidential candidate Svetlana Tikanovskaya in her recorded statement mentioned that according to the copies of protocols, in the commissions “that counted honestly”, she received between 60 and 80 percent of votes, while in Novaya Borovaya even 90%³. Later some members of local electoral commissions described the manipulations that happened at the time of the ballot counting⁴.

As a result, thousands of people all over Belarus started going out into the streets in the evening on August 9th, protesting against the announced preliminary election results claiming that the elections were falsified⁵. Immediate crackdown followed, as a result of which by August 13 over 6 thousand were arrested (according to the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA))⁶, according to some sources, among arrested and detained were even minors⁷ or disabled persons⁸. Many people were arrested without any grounds, e.g. young girl L. that spent 72 hours in the Central Police Holding in Minsk said she was detained on

¹ <http://rec.gov.by/ru/vybory-2020>.

² <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-belarusi-nabljudateli-govorjat-o-zavyshenii-javki-v-15-raza/a-54466210>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3OspbawDCA>.

⁴ <http://015.by/news/obshchestvo/uchitelya-otkazalis-podpisyvat-protokoly-i-rasskazali-chto-proiskhodilo-na-ikh-uchastkakh/>.

⁵ On August 14, 2020 it was declared that the European Union does not accept Belarusian election results and plans to impose sanction on those responsible for violence and falsification. <https://www.euronews.com/2020/08/14/eu-announces-sanctions-against-belarus-over-violence-on-protesters-and-electoral-falsifica>.

⁶ <https://www.mvd.gov.by/ru/news/7345>.

⁷ https://www.b-g.by/news/v-vosmimestnuyu-kameru-nabili-32-cheloveka-zaderzhannyiy-pravozashhitnik-rasskazal-o-tom-chto-videl-v-ivs-i-sizo-v-breste/?fbclid=IwAR2RP2hcPCKa2_w_2kjBu8HARbPiST0EiKrrcpOB_6uKXII0U2nkPOcwPCc.

⁸ <https://naviny.by/article/20200815/1597485162-uzniki-okrestina-shokiryushchie-istorii>.

her way to the sports class⁹, Sergej Makhovikov was detained on August 11 in Minsk for walking along the street with his friends¹⁰.

Detained were held in degrading and inhuman conditions: cells were overcrowded (e.g. 32 people in a cell for 8 inmates¹¹, 124 persons in 34 sq.m. cell¹², 51 women in a cell with 4 bunks, 53 persons in a 16 sq.m. cell, so people could not sleep for several nights and had to stand most of the time, instead of the toilet there was a covered whole in the floor, first food was provided after 30 hours of detention, first water after 15 hours¹³ during the whole night detained could hear or observe brutal beatings^{14,15}.

An anonymous girl in a video recording made after her release on August 14th from the Central Police Holding in Okrestina street in Minsk told that during transportation she was beaten in a bus by ten OMON (Special Purpose Police Detachment) special forces members with batons, humiliated when her pants were taken off, threatened with rape and death¹⁶.

Alesia Cherniavskaya, a middle-aged-lady that was detained near the entrance to the Central Police Holding in Okrestina street on August 10, where she came to help her friend find her missing 16-year old son, told how she and other ladies were beaten, forced to strip naked, made to kneel down; even hygienic pads were taken out from some ladies' underwear to verify that there was nothing hidden inside; elder ladies were also kicked in their buttocks, humiliated, e.g. a prosthetic breast was taken away from one of them. She also witnessed brutal beatings of young girls and men, that were going on non-stop for four days that she spent in the Central police holding; according to her, some people had to starve for 2 or 3 days before first bread was given to them.¹⁷

An anonymous lady, released from the Central Police Holding in Okrestina street told that after the detention about 60 women for about 8 hours were held in an open cell with no walls intended for prison walks, where it was very cold, later she was transferred to a cell, where 5 persons slept on one bunk. She also told that after the detention she and other ladies for 10 hours were kept in handcuffs on their knees bent forward so that their heads were touching the floor, while witnessing heavy beating that was going on around her, "there was sea of blood". Especially those were beaten, including young girls, who did not agree to sign the detention protocol¹⁸.

Belsat journalist Elena Dubovik was arrested on August 10th together with her colleague Tatiana Belashova, both were wearing "Press" vests. Elena was taken to the Central Police Holding in Minsk, where, as she reported, beating started almost immediately, she was beaten repeatedly during the three days of her arrest, including with a knee into stomach. After her release she was hospitalized with suspected ovarian rupture¹⁹. According to Elena, other female inmates were beaten as well.

There are also several allegations of rape in the Central Police Holding in Okrestina street in Minsk by law enforcement officials, even in case of girls as old as 16 years old.²⁰

⁹ <https://people.onliner.by/2020/08/14/na-okrestina-massovo-vypuskayut-lyudej-slava-bogu-zhivyx>.

¹⁰ <https://naviny.by/article/20200815/1597485162-uzniki-okrestina-shokiruyushchie-istorii>.

¹¹ https://www.b-g.by/news/v-vosmimestnuyu-kameru-nabili-32-cheloveka-zaderzhannyiy-pravozashhitnik-rasskazal-o-tom-chto-videl-v-ivs-i-sizo-v-breste/?fbclid=IwAR2RP2hcPCKa2_w_2kjBu8HARbPiST0EiKrrcpOB_6uKXII0U2nkPOcwPCc.

¹² <https://naviny.by/article/20200815/1597485162-uzniki-okrestina-shokiruyushchie-istorii>.

¹³ <https://naviny.by/article/20200815/1597485162-uzniki-okrestina-shokiruyushchie-istorii>.

¹⁴ <https://people.onliner.by/2020/08/14/na-okrestina-massovo-vypuskayut-lyudej-slava-bogu-zhivyx>.

¹⁵ <https://naviny.by/article/20200815/1597485162-uzniki-okrestina-shokiruyushchie-istorii>.

¹⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=76&v=DXvYmStbRTs&feature=emb_title&has_verified=1.

¹⁷ <https://novychas.by/hramadstva/sutki-patrabavali-hutkuju-dapamohu-dlja-dzjauc>.

¹⁸ https://news.tut.by/society/696598.html?utm_campaign=recirculation_mail&utm_medium=bottom_news&utm_source=news.tut.by.

¹⁹ <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/zhurnalistku-belsata-gospitalizirovali-posle-treh-dnej-na-okrestina-ee-izbivala-nadziratelnitsa/>.

²⁰ Telegram canal Nexta live, message at 4:58:11 pm on August 18, 2020. Twitter message https://twitter.com/medulla_ossium on August 17.

In general, medical professionals, similar to journalists, were the professional group specifically targeted by the law enforcement²¹. Although medical volunteers often marked their clothing with red crosses (on the back, at the front, on the caps etc.), they were detained or beaten: e.g. 16 persons were arrested and released on August 14th²²; Anastasia²³, an anesthesiologist, was detained with her colleague neurologist and the driver on August 11 (although she was not beaten, her colleagues were) and released without any documents or belongings on the next day; in one of the locations where medical volunteers gathered to collect medicines, 20 volunteers were beaten with the words: "You'd know next whom not to help", on August 11th a medical volunteer Darina was beaten and hit on her lower back, she was found unconscious by some strangers and regained consciousness only next morning in their apartment; she had blood in her urine for two consecutive days²⁴.

So far, the exact number of those who were brought to hospitals as a result of the crackdown and further persecutions, is unknown. Just as an illustration, some were hospitalized with such diagnosis as traumatic injury, multiple bruises, traumatic shock, concussions, explosive injuries, which would require month-long treatment and rehabilitation.²⁵

Officially, according to the information on August 17th, only two people died, on August 17 about 30 persons were still missing²⁶.

Paradoxically, the protests in general were of a peaceful nature: when viewing available on the internet video footage, one can observe that protesters tried to talk to law enforcement, convince them to low down their shields. On August 10 and consequent days thousands of women dressed in white came out with flowers into the streets and formed 'live chains' in many cities all over the country. Presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and Maria Kolesnikova and Valeria Tsepikalo that supported her during the campaign, numerous times spoke against violence and called for peaceful resolution.

After August 14, when tens and hundreds of thousands started going out into the streets, daily numbers of those detained and arrested drastically decreased, the minister of interior Yuri Karaev publicly apologized but only to those who suffered only "because they happened to be nearby or did not escape in time"²⁷.

We request that the Human Rights Council appeal to the Belarusian authorities:

1. To ensure effective investigation of all incidents of falsifications and manipulations in connection with the 2020 Presidential elections in Belarus, including those committed by the governmental officials responsible for organizing and holding the elections; as a result of which Belarusian people were deprived of their right to free elections (art. 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR));
2. To establish effective mechanism for collecting information and ensure effective investigation of each case of alleged torture and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment (art. 7, art. 10 (1) of ICCPR)²⁸; to hold all the perpetrators accountable including those at the highest level of government;
3. To ensure effective investigation in case of every missing person (Art. 9 of ICCPR);
4. To ensure effective investigation into cases of arbitrary detentions and arrests (Art. 9 of ICCPR);

²¹ <https://health.tut.by/news/doctors/696483.html?tg>.

²² <https://news.tut.by/society/696717.html?yrwinfo=1597654386430368-659724355027324411500120-production-app-host-vla-web-yp-299>.

²³ The name changed at the lady's request.

²⁴ <https://health.tut.by/news/doctors/696483.html?tg>.

²⁵ <https://news.tut.by/society/696687.html>.

²⁶ On August 17 there were 30 persons in the missing persons list on tut.by, according to Belarusian MIA, only 1 person was officially declared missing <https://news.tut.by/society/697089.html?tg>.

²⁷ <https://people.onliner.by/2020/08/13/ministr-mvd-karaev-izvinilsya-za-nasilie>.

²⁸ On August 14 United Nations Secretary General António Guterres stated that allegations of torture and other mistreatment of people under detention must be thoroughly investigated. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-08-14/un-secretary-generals-spokesman-belarus>.

5. To ensure that all victims of violations exercise their right to reparation after gross human rights violations, i.e. provided with financial compensation for physical and mental harm inflicted as a result of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment that would be required to finance their medical treatment and psychological therapy (Art. 2(3) of ICCPR); ensured satisfaction and provided with guarantees of non-recurrence.
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