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Report of human rights in Belarus

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Nils Muižnieks

Summary

The present report provides an overview of major human rights developments in Belarus between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. The information provided in the report demonstrates that the presidential elections held on 26 January 2025 cannot be considered compliant with the right to vote and to be elected in genuine periodic elections, as guaranteed under article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights owing to ongoing politically motivated repression and a complete crackdown on freedom of expression, assembly and association. The report examines severe ill-treatment in detention facilities and the growing trends of transboundary repression through trials held in absentia, collective punishment of families, indefinite extensions of the deprivation of liberty for individuals convicted on politically motivated charges, restrictions on the human rights of former prisoners and the misuse of counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation for political repression. While the recent release by Belarus of over 200 prisoners who are recognized as political prisoners by human rights defenders is a welcome development, the Special Rapporteur finds no indication of an overall improvement in the state of civil and political rights in the country.



I. Introduction

A. Summary

1. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus was established by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 20/13. Since its establishment in 2012, the mandate has been renewed on a yearly basis, most recently, for the twelfth time, in 2024. The current mandate holder, Nils Muižnieks, took up the position on 1 November 2024, replacing Anaïs Marin.

2. The present report, submitted to the Human Rights Council pursuant to its resolution 55/27, provides an overview of major human rights developments in Belarus between the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

3. On 26 January 2025, amidst a complete crackdown on freedom of expression, assembly and association, including the use of brutal repression against anyone suspected of political dissent, Aliaksandr Lukashenka was re-elected as President of Belarus for a seventh term. At present, counter-terrorism and anti-extremist legislation continue to be misused for the politically motivated persecution of opposition politicians, human rights defenders, journalists and civil activists. Increasingly, individuals who fled Belarus following the widespread political repression unleashed in 2020 face extraterritorial persecution, including through in absentia trials without basic fair trial guarantees and the expropriation of their properties in Belarus. Those who remain in the country live in an atmosphere of fear, censorship and self-censorship. Reports of severe ill-treatment of prisoners persist, along with indefinite deprivation of liberty resulting from the imposition of repeated convictions under article 411 of the Criminal Code (“malicious disobedience to the penitentiary administration”) and the politically motivated assignment of individuals to institutions for compulsory psychiatric treatment. Collective punishment is on the rise, with repressive measures targeting family members of individuals deemed disloyal by the authorities. Moreover, recent legal developments have paved the way for a wave of repressive measures against LGBTQ+ persons.

4. Even though over 200 prisoners convicted on politically motivated charges have reportedly been released through presidential pardons and diplomatic efforts by other States, the number of inmates recognized by human rights defenders as political prisoners remains persistently high, while repression for the legitimate exercise of civil and political rights continues and has become more sophisticated. Former prisoners face severe restrictions on their human rights and, de facto, continue to be deprived of their liberty. The Special Rapporteur concludes that Belarus continues to live under the shadow of repression following the previous presidential election of 9 August 2020, which was marked by credible claims of widespread electoral fraud and the brutal repression of peaceful protests.¹

B. Methodology

5. The report relies on confidential submissions, including first-hand testimonies, and on public sources. From December 2024 through March 2025, the Special Rapporteur held consultations in Vilnius, Warsaw, Brussels and Geneva with international and Belarusian civil society actors, State actors, representatives of the Belarusian mass media in exile, international human rights mechanisms, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other stakeholders. A public call for inputs for the report was issued in January 2025.²

¹ See, inter alia, [A/HRC/47/49](#) and [A/HRC/52/68](#).

² See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2025/call-input-2025-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-belarus-human>.

II. Examination of Belarus by international bodies and mechanism

6. Over the period under review, the Special Rapporteur, together with thematic special procedure mandate holders, addressed nine joint communications to the Belarusian authorities, voicing concerns about alleged ill-treatment of persons in detention,³ repression of human rights defenders,⁴ lack of basic fair trial guarantees in trials held in absentia⁵ and human rights violations stemming from proposed amendments to laws ensuring the rights of children.⁶ The Special Rapporteur welcomes the fact that, unlike in previous years, the Belarusian Government has regularly responded to communications from special procedure mandate holders. Furthermore, he was relieved to learn from third parties that several detainees whose cases had been brought to the attention of the Government by mandate holders during the reporting period were later released or experienced slight improvements in their conditions of detention. However, he deplores the fact that most of the questions and recommendations addressed to the Government in the above-mentioned communications remain unanswered and that the situation of the majority of the alleged victims remains dire, raising doubts about the State's genuine engagement with the special procedure system and about the commitment of Belarus to its human rights obligations.

7. At its 134th session, held in September 2024, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances transmitted three reported cases of enforced disappearance to Belarus.⁷

8. On 23 August 2024, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment shared with Belarus a copy of a communication addressed to the Russian Federation regarding alleged enforced disappearances of Ukrainian soldiers transferred to the Russian Federation through the territory of Belarus.⁸

9. Over the reporting period, the human rights situation in Belarus was reviewed by three treaty bodies: the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in August 2024,⁹ the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in September 2024¹⁰ and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in February 2025.¹¹

10. The Human Rights Committee considered 62 repetitive individual communications against Belarus, finding violations of articles 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (right to freedom of expression and right of peaceful assembly), which was ratified by Belarus on 12 November 1973.¹² The cases related to prosecutions during the period 2016–2021 under the Code of Administrative Offences for unlawful production and distribution of mass media products and public calls for or participation in unauthorized peaceful protests.

11. In October 2024, the Committee against Torture, in presenting the results of its confidential 2021–2022 inquiry on Belarus to the General Assembly, reported a systematic practice of torture in the aftermath of the presidential elections of 9 August 2020.¹³

³ See communications BLR 3/2024, BLR 5/2024, BLR 6/2024, BLR 7/2024 and BLR 2/2025. All communications, and replies thereto, mentioned in the present report are available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.

⁴ See communications BLR 4/2024 and BLR 9/2024.

⁵ See communication BLR 8/2024.

⁶ See communication BLR 1/2025.

⁷ A/HRC/WGEID/134/1, paras. 2 and 35.

⁸ See communication RUS 7/2024.

⁹ See CERD/C/BLR/CO/24-25.

¹⁰ See CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1.

¹¹ See CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9.

¹² *Lupach v. Belarus* (CCPR/C/141/D/JC/1); *Kulakov and others v. Belarus* (CCPR/C/141/D/JC/2); and *Amelkovich and others v. Belarus* (CCPR/C/142/D/JC/1).

¹³ A/79/44, paras. 34–48.

12. By its resolution 55/27, the Human Rights Council established the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus. The Group presented its first report on 19 March 2025,¹⁴ endorsing findings of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) about the commission of crimes against humanity in Belarus since May 2020. The Special Rapporteur held several meetings with the Group of Experts in order to establish synergies between the two mandates.

13. On 30 September 2024, Lithuania submitted a referral to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court under article 14(1) of the Rome Statute, requesting the Court to investigate alleged crimes against humanity, including deportation and persecution, committed against the civilian population of Belarus at the behest of senior Belarusian political, law enforcement and military leaders.

14. In her 2024 report, presented to the General Assembly on 30 October 2024, the previous mandate holder examined the level of engagement of Belarus with the United Nations human rights system over the past three decades, concluding that it was at a historical low.¹⁵

15. In its report of 10 February 2025,¹⁶ the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations deplored the persistent failure by Belarus to bring its legislation in line with the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and urged the Government to immediately release all trade union leaders and members arrested for participating in peaceful assemblies or for exercising their civil liberties pursuant to their legitimate trade union activities and to drop all related charges.

III. Human rights concerns

A. Right to life and physical integrity

16. Belarus remains the only country in Europe that applies the death penalty. On 29 June 2024, the Minsk Regional Court condemned a German national to capital punishment on several charges, including “engaging in mercenary activity”, “terrorism” and “undercover activities”. The individual subsequently benefited from a prisoner exchange led by the Russian Federation and the United States of America.

17. Human rights defenders reported two deaths in custody. On 9 April 2024, a Belarusian citizen charged under article 368 (“public insult of the President”) of the Criminal Code died in the Brest pretrial detention centre. In October 2024, a 22-year-old Russian national convicted of espionage died in the Mahilyow colony No. 15.

18. In November 2024, the State Border Committee announced that, since 2021, 60 migrants had been found dead at the borders of Belarus with member States of the European Union.¹⁷ At the same time, the Permanent Mission of Belarus in Geneva announced that Belarus had recorded 70 deaths of migrants pushed back from member States of the European Union over recent years.¹⁸ According to information received from human rights defenders, between the summer of 2021 and 1 December 2024, 120 persons on the move died along the borders of Belarus.

¹⁴ See A/HRC/58/68.

¹⁵ See A/79/201.

¹⁶ See https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Report%20III%28A%29-2025-%5BNORMES-241219-002%5D-EN_0.pdf, pp. 115–123.

¹⁷ See <https://belta.by/society/view/gpk-na-granitse-s-es-s-2021-goda-obnaruzheny-pogibshimi-60-chelovek-673645-2024/> (in Russian).

¹⁸ See https://mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/c546621537043cee.html (in Russian).

B. Ill-treatment in places of detention

19. The Special Rapporteur received multiple reports, including first-hand testimonies, about consistently inhuman conditions of detention and intentional ill-treatment in women's and men's correctional colonies and prisons, including: frequent and arbitrary use of harsh disciplinary measures as punishment for minor or fabricated transgressions; denial of prompt and adequate medical care; prolonged solitary confinement and incommunicado detention; arbitrary restrictions on communication of prisoners with their families and legal counsel; lack of proper hygiene; inadequate and insufficient provision of food, medicine and clothing; forced labour, regardless of the health condition of detainees; tolerance of and incitement by penitentiary authorities of inter-prisoner violence; and psychological violence inflicted on detainees by penitentiary staff.

20. Of particular concern are reports of inmates experiencing significant health deterioration, including life-threatening conditions, and the absence of mental health support for prisoners at risk of suicide. While ill-treatment in penitentiary institutions is reportedly widespread, prisoners convicted for actual or perceived opposition to the Government appear to be particularly vulnerable to intentional abuse. Moreover, underage prisoners are reportedly not spared such ill-treatment. As in adult correctional colonies, in the juvenile correctional colony prisoners may be held in a punitive isolation cell (SHIZO), where inmates are held incommunicado.¹⁹

21. Over the period under review, together with thematic special procedure mandate holders, the Special Rapporteur addressed five communications to the Government, informing it about dozens of reported cases of ill-treatment in Belarusian places of detention.²⁰ Names of some alleged perpetrators among the penitentiary staff were shared. Regrettably, judging by responses from the State, it appears that no investigations have been carried out into these allegations.

22. In particular, the attention of the authorities was brought to allegations of widespread ill-treatment in women's correctional colonies Nos. 4 and 24 that has disproportionately affected women convicted in relation to protests around the 2020 presidential elections. In addition to ill-treatment practices similar to those affecting male prisoners, women detainees are reportedly subjected to gender-based violence, including strip searches by male staff, even during menstrual periods; denial of hygiene products and painkillers; harsh compulsory physical labour during menstruation; lack of proper gynaecological care; and restrictions on communication between mothers and their children, including young children.²¹ The experts deplored the blatant lack of accountability for ill-treatment of women detainees, notwithstanding multiple consistent allegations transmitted to the Belarusian authorities over the past two years.²²

23. The experts also raised concerns with the Government about the disproportionate impact of alleged ill-treatment practices on older prisoners.²³

24. In mid-March 2025, some 10 prisoners convicted in relation to protests related to the 2020 presidential elections were reportedly held incommunicado, six of them for over two years, which, in some cases, raised concerns about possible enforced disappearances.²⁴ However, at the time of submission of this report in mid-April 2025, no news had been

¹⁹ See <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-belarusi-za-izmenu-gosudarstvu-sudat-daze-detej/a-71842299> (in Russian).

²⁰ See communications BLR 3/2024, BLR 5/2024, BLR 6/2024, BLR 7/2024 and BLR 2/2025. See also "Belarus: Inmate ill-treatment and possible enforced disappearances ongoing concerns, say UN experts" (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/belarus-inmate-ill-treatment-and-possible-enforced-disappearances-ongoing>).

²¹ See communication BLR 7/2024.

²² See communications BLR 7/2024 and BLR 2/2025; see also "Belarus: Experts deplore blatant lack of accountability for ill-treatment of women in detention" (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/belarus-experts-deplore-blatant-lack-accountability-ill-treatment-women>).

²³ See communications BLR 3/2024, BLR 5/2024, BLR 6/2024 and BLR 2/2025; see also <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/belarus-call-release-older-political-prisoners>.

²⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/belarus-experts-mark-second-anniversary-enforced-disappearance-siarhei>.

received about the fate of the lawyer Maksim Znak, the politician Mikalai Statkevich and the blogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski, all three of whom have been held incommunicado since February and March 2023.

25. Ahead of the 26 January 2025 presidential elections, news emerged about three other detainees who disappeared during February and March 2023. In November 2024, the prominent opposition activist Maria Kalesnikava was allowed to meet her father and was shown on a Telegram channel known to be close to the authorities. A video and photos of the opposition politician Viktor Babaryka appeared in January 2025 on the same Telegram channel. In mid-January 2025, the public television channel ONT TV aired an interview with Ihar Losik.²⁵ Nevertheless, all three individuals remain deprived of communication with the outside world.

26. Along with the interview with Ihar Losik, ONT television aired interviews with two other journalists and a lawyer, all of whom had been recognized by human rights defenders as political prisoners. In front of the camera, the four prisoners accused Western States of having attempted to interfere with the Belarusian 2020 presidential elections by manipulating public opinion through western-backed mass media.²⁶ These interviews are reminiscent of the interview with the opposition activist Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk, reportedly subjected to ill-treatment in detention,²⁷ which was recorded in the correctional colony No. 24 and aired on the public TV channel News in March 2024. In the video, she praised President Lukashenka for his acts in 2020 and asked for forgiveness.²⁸ Following her liberation in January 2025 and her departure from Belarus, she publicly announced that the interview had been recorded under duress.

27. In 2024, human rights defenders identified 669 such “penance videos” by persons deprived of liberty, recorded in police stations, at the Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption or in penitentiary institutions and published on pro-government Telegram channels or on State television. In some cases, mocking special effects and animation had been added to the videos. The Special Rapporteur believes that the practice of recording such videos of persons deprived of liberty, at the mercy and under the full control of State agents, and therefore unable to freely express their will, is a form of ill-treatment contrary to articles 7 and 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and may be a sign of other severe ill-treatment imposed on persons in detention.

28. Reports of ill-treatment in detention arise in the context of a lack of independent monitoring mechanisms and restrictions on inmates’ access to legal counsel. The Special Rapporteur has received reports about retaliatory practices by penitentiary staff against inmates who complain to monitoring missions conducted by prosecutorial authorities. Allegations have been received about possible complicity of penitentiary administrations, the Department of Correctional Services and the Public Prosecutor’s Office in covering up ill-treatment in penitentiary institutions.

29. Inmates who are detained incommunicado or whose communication with the outside world is severely restricted are effectively prevented from accessing legal counsel. Domestic legislation does not mandate legal aid for convicted inmates and their access to a lawyer is only possible upon request (article 83(6) of the Penal Enforcement Code). In practice, this provision is interpreted as requiring the inmate to submit a written request for a lawyer, specifying the lawyer’s name. The Special Rapporteur has received reports of families of prisoners held in total or partial incommunicado detention being unable to inform their loved ones of the name of the counsel they have hired. Additionally, in politically sensitive cases, it is reportedly nearly impossible to find a lawyer willing to take on such cases as lawyers have also been arbitrarily detained, disbarred or prosecuted in retaliation for defending victims of politically motivated persecution. The Special Rapporteur has even received accounts of inmates being effectively barred from requesting legal counsel because they are not provided with paper to submit a written request.

²⁵ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL1_deApvn0I (in Russian).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See communications BLR 6/2024 and BLR 7/2024.

²⁸ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8i68-0dgJ1A> (in Russian).

C. Arbitrary detention

Amnesty and pardons

30. From July 2024 through early 2025, an amnesty (law 19-Z of 2 June 2024) was passed and several waves of presidential pardons were issued in Belarus. While the amnesty law excluded prisoners convicted on charges known for being used in politically motivated prosecutions,²⁹ over 200 individuals recognized by human rights defenders as political prisoners have reportedly been granted pardons.³⁰ However, many of those pardoned were serving relatively short sentences for online crimes and were nearing release. According to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on human rights, those pardoned were often forced to sign agreements committing themselves to cooperate with the Committee of State Security (KGB) in the identification of support networks for political prisoners. In addition, authorities forced some individuals to make propaganda videos.

31. The release of several more Belarusian and foreign nationals was reportedly facilitated through the diplomatic engagement of Western States, including the widely publicized prisoner exchange between the Russian Federation and the United States. The release of the foreign citizens suggested a possible foreign policy dimension, with some observers speculating that the Belarusian authorities were seeking to end their international isolation.³¹ This speculation was further fuelled by reports that an American envoy travelled to Belarus to secure the release of several prisoners and to seek a deal for the release of many people in exchange for the easing of sanctions.³²

32. Like his predecessor and colleagues among thematic special procedure mandate holders, who also welcome the release of prisoners, the Special Rapporteur is concerned that many individuals convicted without fair trial for the legitimate exercise of their civil and political rights remain in detention.³³ Despite the releases, the overall number of inmates identified by human rights NGOs as political prisoners remained steady over the reporting year, at over 1200, because arrests, detentions and prosecutions have continued unabated. Those behind bars include human rights defenders, journalists, opposition politicians, independent trade unionists, environmental and civil activists and lawyers. According to various reports received in mid-March, there may be over a dozen minors deprived of liberty on politically motivated charges.

Exclusion of persons convicted for “extremism” from benefitting from non-custodial measures

33. During the reporting period, there was a welcome shift in the domestic criminal justice system towards the increased use of non-custodial measures, brought about through the adoption of Law No. 61-Z of 17 February 2025, on “amendments to the code on criminal liability”. The bill introduced alternative sanctions for several offences that were formerly punished by imprisonment, exempting certain individuals (minors, legal guardians of children under 14 or children with disabilities, persons with grave diseases or major disabilities) from pretrial detention and imprisonment.

²⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/belarus-call-release-older-political-prisoners>.

³⁰ The Special Rapporteur has received various estimates of the number of persons released under the pardons. By mid-March 2025, civil society actors had identified the names of 150 pardoned individuals and had calculated that a total of 258 persons had been pardoned, based on the information from the public pardon decrees. Meanwhile, during the interactive dialogue with the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus at the Human Rights Council on 19 March 2025, the Belarusian delegation announced that 293 individuals had been pardoned over the past year. A Telegram channel close to the press service of the President had previously reported the same number (https://t.me/pul_1/15346) (in Russian).

³¹ See <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/09/belarus-lukashenko-political-prisoners>.

³² See <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/15/world/europe/belarus-us-prisoners-diplomacy.html>.

³³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/belarus-inmate-ill-treatment-and-possible-enforced-disappearances-ongoing>.

34. The shift towards non-custodial measures is in line with recommendations made to Belarus by treaty bodies³⁴ and by the former Special Rapporteur,³⁵ as well as with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures (the Tokyo Rules) and the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules). The Special Rapporteur regrets, however, that the exemptions from pretrial detention and from imprisonment do not apply to persons convicted for “extremist-related activities”. Given the vagueness of the domestic anti-extremist legal framework and its misuse for politically motivated persecutions (see paras. 71–78 below), the exclusion of persons convicted on “extremist” charges from the scope of the Law No. 61-Z does not appear justified by the gravity of the offences committed but rather discriminates against individuals prosecuted based on their actual or perceived political opinions.

Prison term extensions under article 411 of the Criminal Code

35. Together with other special procedure mandate holders, the Special Rapporteur repeatedly raised concerns with the Belarusian authorities about the practice of extending indefinite prison terms under article 411 of the Criminal Code for “malicious disobedience” to penitentiary authorities.³⁶ In the absence of independent monitoring of detention facilities and effective complaint mechanisms, prisoners are entirely at the mercy of penitentiary staff, who, according to consistent reports, routinely engage in intentional ill-treatment. This includes imposing harsh disciplinary sanctions to punish prisoners for minor or fabricated transgressions. The deliberate multiplication of arbitrary disciplinary sanctions, with the effect of indefinitely extending an inmate’s imprisonment under article 411 of the Criminal Code, appears to be a tactic intentionally used by penitentiary staff as a form of ill-treatment. Of particular concern is the case of Viktoria Kulsha, who, according to information received in January 2025, was being prosecuted under article 411 of the Criminal Code for the third time, after having seen her imprisonment extended by two years following her first two convictions.

Restrictions on the liberty of former prisoners

36. According to various sources, upon release from penal colonies and prisons, individuals listed by human rights NGOs as political prisoners face severe restrictions on their rights and freedoms, including a prohibition on leaving the country, an obligation to report regularly to a local police station and frequent home visits by the police.³⁷ Depending on the individual, such supervision (“*nadzor*”) by the police may happen on a weekly or even a daily basis. As a result, some former prisoners reportedly find themselves in conditions similar to house arrest. Inclusion in the official lists of individuals involved in extremism or terrorism entails additional restrictions for former prisoners (see paras. 75–78 below).

Compulsory psychiatric treatment

37. According to consistent reports from different sources, at least 33 persons aged up to 77 years have been transferred by court decisions for compulsory psychiatric treatment as a result of their criminal prosecution on politically motivated charges, for example, for participation in protests (article 342 of the Criminal Code), insulting the President (article 368 of the Criminal Code) and insulting a representative of the authorities (article 369 of the Criminal Code). Eight people out of this number have been released.³⁸ These persons are reportedly held incommunicado in a psychiatric hospital. Unlike prisoners in penitentiary institutions, their detention is not time limited and they cannot benefit from amnesties, presidential pardons or release on parole. Their trials reportedly happen behind closed doors since they are considered to be persons “who have committed socially dangerous acts” under article 6 (13) of the Criminal Procedure Code.

³⁴ CCPR/C/BLR/CO/5, para. 36 (a); CAT/C/BLR/CO/5, para. 22 (a); and CRC/C/BLR/CO/5-6, para. 43 (c).

³⁵ A/75/173, para. 79 (n).

³⁶ See communications BLR 5/2024, BLR 6/2024 and BLR 2/2025.

³⁷ A/HRC/56/65, para. 69.

³⁸ See <https://spring96.org/ru/news/117443> (in Russian).

D. Right to a fair trial

38. According to the Viasna Human Rights Centre, by the end of 2024, at least 6,550 people had been criminally convicted on politically motivated charges since 2020,³⁹ including 1,721 persons in 2024.⁴⁰ According to statistics released by the Supreme Court, in 2024, over 40 teenagers were convicted under criminal charges typically used for political prosecution: participation in protests (29 persons); incitement to hatred (3); massive disorder (3); insulting the President (3); calling for sanctions (3); high treason (1); and insulting a public official (1).⁴¹ In addition, the Viasna Human Rights Centre recorded 5,890 politically motivated trials on administrative charges in 2024.⁴²

39. On 23 January 2025, together with the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, the Special Rapporteur issued a statement for the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer,⁴³ expressing alarm over the unprecedented stranglehold of the Executive over legal professionals and calling on Belarus to restore the independence and safety of its legal profession. At the moment when the statement was released, at least nine lawyers had reportedly been criminally convicted in Belarus for exercising their human rights or professional duties, six of whom were imprisoned. The Special Rapporteur also participated in several online events to raise awareness about the illegitimate pressure exercised by Belarusian authorities on attorneys.

40. In November 2024, reports emerged about the first recorded conviction for “aiding and abetting extremist activities” (sect. 361-4 of the Criminal Code) in retaliation for the independent monitoring of trials. A man was reportedly sentenced to seven years in prison and a fine equivalent to over \$12,000 because he was attending trials of individuals prosecuted on extremist charges and was sharing information about the proceedings with organizations located abroad identified by the authorities as “extremist formations”⁴⁴ (a label given to all prominent human rights NGOs in exile). Meanwhile, the authorities started bringing university students to trial for extremism, lecturing them on “topical issues, including on extremism” directly in the courtroom.⁴⁵

41. Initial reports have emerged about posthumous convictions: two deceased persons were convicted under article 127 of the Criminal Code (on “genocide”) in relation to events during the Second World War. Relevant amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code were passed in 2023.

42. On 18 December 2024, together with other special procedure mandate holders, the Special Rapporteur addressed a communication⁴⁶ to the Belarusian Government expressing concern about the growing number of in absentia criminal proceedings (“special proceedings”) against Belarusian citizens living abroad. In absentia trials, which became legally possible in 2022, are conducted without basic fair trial guarantees, can lead to heavy prison sentences and the expropriation of property. Under domestic legislation, in absentia trials can also result in the imposition of the death penalty and lead to deprivation of citizenship. The political motivation of in absentia trials appears to have been confirmed by President Aliaksandr Lukashenka in April 2024, when he publicly threatened citizens living abroad who were “hatching plans against the motherland” with the expropriation of their property.⁴⁷ On 20 May 2024, the State television channel ONT-TV aired a programme about

³⁹ See <https://spring96.org/be/news/117166> (in Belarusian).

⁴⁰ See <https://spring96.org/be/news/117166> (in Belarusian).

⁴¹ See <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-belarusi-za-izmenu-gosudarstvu-sudat-daze-detej/a-71842299> (in Russian).

⁴² See <https://spring96.org/be/news/117083> (in Belarusian).

⁴³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-belarus>.

⁴⁴ See <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/belarus-prigovor-vitaliyu-chopiku/33212054.html> (in Russian).

⁴⁵ See <https://belta.by/society/view/zhitel-grodno-prigovoren-k-chetyrem-godam-lisheniya-svobody-za-ekstremizm-677437-2024/> (in Russian).

⁴⁶ See communication BLR 8/2024.

⁴⁷ See <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/vtoroy-den-zasedaniya-vii-vsebelorusskogo-narodnogo-sobraniya> (in Russian).

seizures of real estate properties of Belarusians in exile who had called for sanctions against Belarus.⁴⁸

43. According to reports from representatives of civil society, 110 people were prosecuted in absentia in 2024, compared to only 18 in 2023.⁴⁹ Over the reporting period, in absentia proceedings were conducted against opposition politicians, journalists, analysts and human rights defenders, as well as 104 participants in “Independence Day” (25 March) celebrations, marking the anniversary of the 1918 declaration of the Belarusian People’s Republic, which, according to the Investigative Committee, were “gatherings of radicals aimed at discrediting Belarus”.⁵⁰

44. The Special Rapporteur regrets that the response provided by the Government to the communication only included generic references to domestic legislation and did not contain a single comment on the alleged violations of the right to fair trial of 13 individuals convicted in absentia whose cases were described in the communication.

E. Collective punishment and retaliation for solidarity

45. On 25 April 2024, while chairing the All-Belarusian People’s Assembly, President Lukashenka threatened families of Belarusians in exile: “Don’t forget you are doing a lot of harm to your relatives (...) don’t put your relatives at risk”.⁵¹ Indeed, the Special Rapporteur has received numerous accounts about pressure exercised by the authorities over relatives of persons in exile and persons recognized by human rights NGOs as political prisoners. Families of many prisoners avoid contact with human rights defenders and with special procedure mandate holders, most likely owing to fear of retaliation by the authorities.

46. Throughout the period under review, reports continued to emerge about the persecution of individuals who expressed solidarity with persons listed by human rights NGOs as political prisoners, including their own family members. Convictions under article 361-4 of the Criminal Code (“aiding and abetting extremist activities”) targeted those who sent letters, money transfers or aid packages to such prisoners. In addition, reports indicated the prosecution of aid beneficiaries under article 24.15 of the Code of Administrative Offences (“violation of foreign gratuitous aid legislation”). Throughout 2024, trials were held against individuals who used “INeedHelpBy”, an initiative to provide food for people who lost income due to political activities, which was declared an “extremist formation” by the State Security Committee in January 2024. By mid-March 2025, the Special Rapporteur had received a list of 26 individuals, including relatives of persons recognized by human rights defenders as political prisoners, who had been sentenced in 2024 and early 2025 to imprisonment for expressing solidarity with prisoners and an additional list of six individuals sentenced to house arrest (“*khimiya*”) for the same reason. The prison sentences go up to 14 years. Only one person has reportedly been pardoned.

47. There were reportedly two waves of repression against family members of persons designated by human rights defenders as political prisoners in 2024, in January and in late October. In August 2024, several individuals associated with volunteer networks and organizations providing assistance to political prisoners were reportedly arrested. The information obtained by security forces as a result of those arrests was used for a new wave of raids, targeting over 50 relatives of prisoners and individuals who had previously sought humanitarian aid. In February 2025, the elderly mothers of several political prisoners were sentenced to prison for expressing solidarity or for giving interviews in 2022 to independent media outlets.

⁴⁸ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZX-SveCyZVc> (in Russian).

⁴⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/belarus-un-experts-alarmed-about-widespread-absentia-trials>.

⁵⁰ See <https://belta.by/society/view/sk-spisok-podozrevaemyh-po-delu-ekstremistov-zarubezhjja-popolnilsja-na-104-familii-634593-2024/> (in Russian).

⁵¹ See <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/vtoroy-den-zasedaniya-vii-vsebelorusskogo-narodnogo-sobraniya> (in Russian).

F. Right to vote and be elected in genuine, periodic elections

48. Over the reporting period, Belarus held elections for: the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, from 1 to 10 April 2024; the upper chamber of Parliament (the Council of the Republic), on 4 April 2024; and President, on 26 January 2025. Earlier in 2024, Belarus held elections for the lower chamber of Parliament (the House of Representatives) and local elections, without Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observers and following a deliberate eradication of all opposition political parties.⁵²

49. According to official results, on 26 January 2025, President Lukashenko, in office since 1994, was re-elected for a seventh term, with 86.82 per cent of the vote and a participation rate of 85.7 per cent. The Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus reacted to his re-election, expressing fears of continuing patterns of repression and human rights violations.⁵³

50. The free expression of the will of voters requires basic guarantees of freedom of opinion and expression, assembly and association. The presidential election of 26 January 2025 was held in the context of the complete eradication of those freedoms⁵⁴ and of massive ongoing repression against anyone connected to the 2020 protests or otherwise suspected of support for the political opposition. Unsurprisingly, no protests broke out around the election, unlike those around the 2020 presidential election. It has been brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur that even individuals who simply added their signatures in favour of opposition candidates ahead of the 2020 presidential election have been added to informal "blacklists" and been prevented from winning contracts in public procurement.

51. The process of preparing for the election was marked by unpredictability, haste and a lack of transparency. On 23 October 2024 the date for the election was set for 26 January 2025, six months ahead of the initially expected date and seven days before the deadline for the registration of "initiative groups" nominating presidential candidates. The initiative groups were given only one week to register at the beginning of November 2024.⁵⁵

52. Because of a last-minute invitation, extended only 10 days prior the presidential election, OSCE was unable to send observers.⁵⁶ Instead, the authorities hand-picked observers, reporting the presence of over 44,000 national observers and 486 foreign observers, including delegations from the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Pan-African Parliament and 112 individual observers. Human rights defenders, most of whom have been forced into exile or deprived of their liberty, reported difficulties in observing the elections owing to the impossibility of openly operating in the country, limited public information and a generalized atmosphere of fear. This fear was fuelled by widespread repression targeting anyone who shared information with human rights defenders or exile mass media.

53. Constitutional amendments passed in 2022 and legislative amendments of 2023⁵⁷ significantly narrowed the range of people who could stand in the elections by raising the age limit for candidates to 40 and barring from participation people who had lived abroad for the past 20 years, had ever possessed a foreign citizenship, a foreign residence permit or "another document of a foreign State entitling them to benefits or other advantages". This, together, with 2023 legislative amendments, which put an end to the establishment of polling stations abroad, resulted in the effective impossibility for most Belarusians residing abroad to run in or vote in the elections, including more than 300,000 Belarusians who fled the country following persecution related to the 2020 presidential elections.

54. Several prominent political opposition figures who had been arbitrarily detained and convicted in unfair trials prior to and in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential elections, such

⁵² A/HRC/56/65, paras. 13 and 111–113.

⁵³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/belarus-outcome-presidential-elections-likely-result-continuing-human-rights?sub-site=HRC>.

⁵⁴ On freedom of association, see A/HRC/56/65, paras. 74–124.

⁵⁵ See <https://elections2025.spring96.org/en/news/117067>.

⁵⁶ See https://x.com/osce_odih/status/1880273238187495494; and <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/584445>.

⁵⁷ A/HRC/50/58, para. 58; and A/79/201, para. 77.

as Viktor Babaryka, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Maria Kalesnikava and Mikola Statkevich, remain in prison. Others, including Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Pavel Latushka and Valery Tsepkalo, are in exile, having been convicted in absentia, and face arrest if they return to Belarus.

55. While the authorities barred some challengers from standing for election by placing them in prison or forcing them into exile, they prevented others from participation by arbitrarily disqualifying them as candidates. Thus, using various pretexts, in late 2024, election authorities rejected the candidacies of Yuras Hubarevich, Aliaxandar Drazdou, Diana Kovaleva and Victor Kulesh. Only four “competitors” to President Lukashenko were allowed to remain in the race, and all four expressed their support for the incumbent, demonstrating the lack of pluralism.

56. In addition to the arbitrary restrictions on passive and active voting rights, the authorities implemented a number of measures targeting those who may have wanted to challenge the conduct of the elections. The authorities targeted, in particular, democratic forces in exile, which organized elections for the “Coordination Council”, a “proto parliament” of the Belarusian opposition in exile created in 2020. In May 2024, the Investigative Committee launched criminal cases against all 257 participants in the elections to the Council under articles 357 (“conspiracy to seize State power”), 361 (“calls for sanctions”), 361-1 (“creation of an extremist formation”), 361-4 (“aiding and abetting extremist activities”) of the Criminal Code, labelling them as representatives of 12 “extremist formations”. The authorities carried out searches and arrests of the properties of these individuals in Belarus.⁵⁸

57. As the election approached, in November 2024, raids targeted relatives of persons recognized by human rights NGOs as political prisoners.⁵⁹ In late January 2025, the authorities engaged in a round of repression on former political prisoners and their families, with police conducting unscheduled home visits and summoning former detainees and their relatives for “preventive conversations”. Reports emerged in the media about some former prisoners who had served prison terms related to the 2020 protests being forced to report to the police on election day and being threatened to keep them from voting.⁶⁰ In addition, propaganda videos showing persons recognized as political prisoners who were still serving their sentences were aired on State television (see paras. 26–27 above).

58. These measures resulted in a lack of genuine electoral competition. The Special Rapporteur concludes that the 2025 presidential election in Belarus was held in violation of article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which recognizes the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs and the right to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections. Belarus has severely restricted the right to take part in elections and to freely choose representatives, while subverting the free expression of the will of the electors.

G. Freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of the media

59. In the 2024 World Press Freedom Index, Belarus ranked 167 out of 180 countries, a decline of 13 places within a year.⁶¹ According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, in 2024 alone, 27 media workers were detained, 14 of whom were sentenced to administrative arrest. Furthermore, 66 searches and inspections were carried out in the offices of media outlets and in journalists’ apartments.⁶² For example, in December 2024, the authorities placed most of the team of the *Intex-Press* independent newspaper in pretrial detention on

⁵⁸ See <https://belta.by/society/view/sk-vozbuzhdeny-ugolovnye-dela-v-otnoshenii-257-chlenov-ekstremistskih-formirovanij-635760-2024/> (in Russian).

⁵⁹ See https://nashaniva.com/ru/355353#google_vignette (in Russian).

⁶⁰ See <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/87862.html> (in Russian).

⁶¹ See <https://rsf.org/en/index>.

⁶² See <https://jfj.fund/attacks-on-media-workers-in-belarus-in-2023-2024/#ukr>.

criminal charges;⁶³ some of them were convicted under the Code of Administrative Offences. As of the end of January 2025, 39 journalists remained in prison.⁶⁴

60. The authorities continue to detain, fine and prevent journalists and other media workers from doing their work, using vaguely defined legislative provisions on countering extremism or terrorism, often applying the relevant legislation retroactively. “Penance videos” of imprisoned journalists aimed at discrediting the mass media that covered the protests around the 2020 presidential elections were aired on State television ahead of the 2025 presidential election (see para. 26 above).

61. Reports have emerged about the prosecution of people who: subscribed to, commented on, reposted or “liked” online “extremist materials”, including publications of independent mass media; gave interviews to independent media; and left online comments critical of the Government or of its support for the Russian Federation in the war with Ukraine. In May 2024, the first criminal case under article 361-4 of the Criminal Code (“aiding and abetting extremist activity”) was reportedly initiated for sharing “extremist” information in messaging apps, an act that had previously been prosecuted only on administrative charges.

62. By late March 2025, the authorities had designated 38 media outlets as “extremist formations” or “extremist organizations”,⁶⁵ including nine during the reporting period.⁶⁶ The list of extremist materials has 6,982 entries, including 2,012 Telegram resources. In 2024 alone, 2,424 information products were designated as “extremist materials”, among them 479 Telegram resources. In February 2025, the Prosecutor General’s Office reported that, over the course of 2024, the Minsk regional prosecutorial authorities had transmitted over 1,000 requests to courts for recognizing information as “extremist materials”.⁶⁷ According to the Viasna Human Rights Centre, in 2024, domestic courts adopted 1,444 decisions on the recognition of information as “extremist materials”. The new entries included history books, songs, music videos, personal social media pages and Telegram channels. Since 2008, there have been 3,567 such court decisions.⁶⁸ For the first time, in 2024, the “extremist material” label was applied to an LGBTQ+ resource and to a website offering advice for military conscripts.⁶⁹ In January 2025, the website “Convenient City/Petitions.by”, which allowed citizens to petition the authorities about municipal issues, was also included on the list of extremist materials.⁷⁰

63. On 21 November 2024, the Ministry of Information issued a list of 35 printed publications containing information “likely to harm national interests” and forbidden for distribution in Belarus,⁷¹ including manga, LGBTQ+ literature, erotic fiction and unofficial studies on the history of Belarus.

64. In 2024, the authorities imposed additional restrictions on advertising in the media, requiring anyone who places advertising in any form on the Internet (including bloggers) to register in the official registry of advertisers. Any outlet publishing advertisements must also publish State social advertising, including public service announcements warning against consuming independent “extremist” media.⁷²

⁶³ See <https://baj.media/en/mass-arrests-take-place-in-baranavichy-targeting-intex-press-staff/>.

⁶⁴ See <https://baj.media/en/aglyady-manitoringi/repressions-against-journalists-in-belarus-2025-list-of-colleagues-in-prison/>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See <https://baj.media/be/aglyady-manitoringi/rjepresii-suprac-zhurnalista-i-medya-2025-godze-spis-znjavolenyh/> (in Belorussian).

⁶⁷ See <https://t.me/s/prokuraturabelarus?after=8891> (in Russian).

⁶⁸ See <https://spring96.org/en/news/117197>.

⁶⁹ See https://humanconstantia.org/en/results-of-the-fight-against-extremism-in-belarus-in-2024/#First_LGBTQ_resource_labeled_as_extremist.

⁷⁰ See <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/87919.html> (in Russian).

⁷¹ See <http://mininform.gov.by/news/actual/spisok-iz-35-naimenovaniy-pechatnykh-izdaniy-zapreshchennykh-k-rasprostraneniyu-na-territorii-respub/> (in Russian).

⁷² See <https://baj.media/ru/o-novom-zakone-o-reklame/> and <https://ivje.gov.by/ru/actual-ru/view/omerax-protivodejstviya-ekstremizmu-i-terrorizmu-reabilitatsii-natsizma-otvetstvennost-za-25945-2024> (in Russian).

65. In April 2024, the authorities passed a directive allowing the disconnection of websites deemed extremist. On New Year's Day, the authorities disabled access to YouTube to prevent people from seeing exiled leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's message and tested out a nationwide Internet shutdown. In January, just prior to the elections, the authorities disabled access to the Internet once again, and restricted the operation of Telegram messenger.⁷³

66. As in previous years, reports continued to emerge in 2024 about repression and unjustified limitations on freedom of expression in the cultural sphere, including the arbitrary detentions and prosecution of actors, the designation as "extremist" of artistic output and the cancellation of concerts and music festivals.⁷⁴ In October 2024, the Minister of Culture boasted about the cultural community having been "purified of destructive elements".⁷⁵

H. Freedom of association and assembly

67. Freedom of association and assembly in Belarus remain nearly non-existent.⁷⁶ At the beginning of 2025, the authorities had designated a total of 257 "extremist formations", 89 of which had been designated as such in 2024,⁷⁷ including the website of the Union of Poles in Belarus and the Belarusian National Youth Council (RADA), an umbrella youth organization. In early 2025, the list included 253 entities designated by the Ministry of Interior or the KGB, along with two organizations designated by the courts. In January 2025, more than 100 civil society representatives remained in detention, with ongoing reports of new detentions.⁷⁸ A governmental campaign to forcibly liquidate NGOs continued in 2024, and many organizations decided to self-liquidate. From the beginning of 2021 to the end of December 2024, at least 1186 NGOs were forcibly liquidated, while at least 705 self-liquidated.⁷⁹ Thus, for example, during the reporting period, at least seven environmental organizations were reportedly liquidated by courts or registering authorities. In April 2024, a raid was conducted against "collaborators" of the Viasna Human Rights Centre.⁸⁰

68. Throughout 2024, bar associations, deprived of independence in the previous years, were reportedly used as State instruments for pre-election propaganda.

69. The compulsory re-registration of the 3,592 existing religious organizations is ongoing and should be finished by 1 January 2026.⁸¹ This process, launched by Law No. 334-Z of 30 December 2023, was criticized by the previous Special Rapporteur, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.⁸²

70. In early 2025, ILO reported having received information about 47 trade union leaders and activists detained or whose freedom of movement was restricted.⁸³ According to information shared with the Special Rapporteur, on 20 May 2025, 29 trade unionists were

⁷³ <https://www.agents.media/v-belarusi-ogranichili-internet-pered-vyborami/> (in Russian).

⁷⁴ See <https://penbelarus.org/en/2025/02/20/manitoryng-parushennyau-kulturnyh-pravou-i-pravou-chalaveka-u-dachynenni-da-dzeyachau-kultury-belarus-2024-god.html>.

⁷⁵ <https://belta.by/culture/view/markevich-sovremennaja-kultura-litso-strany-v-mire-667694-2024/> (in Russian).

⁷⁶ On the destruction of the freedom of association, see A/HRC/56/65.

⁷⁷ See <https://spring96.org/en/news/117124>.

⁷⁸ See <https://www.lawtrend.org/freedom-of-association/monitoring-situatsii-so-svobodaj-assotsiatsij-i-polozeniem-organizatsij-grazhdanskogo-obshhestva-v-respublike-belarus-yanvar-2025> (in Russian).

⁷⁹ See <https://www.lawtrend.org/english/monitoring-of-the-situation-with-freedom-of-association-and-the-status-of-civil-society-organizations-in-the-republic-of-belarus-november-december-2024> (in Russian).

⁸⁰ See <https://belta.by/society/view/sotrudniki-gubopika-zaderzhali-posobnikov-ekstremistskogo-pravozaschitnogo-tsentra-vesna-625630-2024/> (in Russian).

⁸¹ See <https://narovlya.by/novosti/obschestvo/religioznye-organizatsii-dolzhy-predstavit-dokumenty-dlya-pereregistratsii-ne-pozdnee-5-iyulya-2025-goda/> (in Russian).

⁸² A/HRC/56/65, paras. 117–122.

⁸³ See https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Report%20III%28A%29-2025-%5BNORMES-241219-002%5D-EN_0.pdf, pp. 115–123.

serving prison sentences in correctional colonies and the freedom of some 30 others was restricted by other means. In total, over 70 trade unionists had been criminally prosecuted.

I. Human rights of individuals prosecuted under terrorism and extremism charges

71. The Belarusian authorities continued to weaponize the domestic counter-terrorism and anti-extremist legal framework for persecuting their actual or perceived political opponents.⁸⁴ According to statistics shared by the Investigative Committee in late November 2024, it had recorded 22,500 “crimes of extremist nature” over the past five years, including over 1,000 in 2024.⁸⁵ Such crimes include “participation in unauthorized events”, “participation in mass disorders”, “funding extremist activities” and “insulting the authorities”.⁸⁶ In 2024, 1,188 individuals were added to the list of persons involved in extremist activities compiled by the Ministry of Interior. In late March, there were 5,073 names on the list. Additionally, there were 269 entries on the Ministry’s list of “organizations, formations and individual entrepreneurs involved in extremist activities”.⁸⁷ In December 2024, a woman repeatedly prosecuted under extremist charges committed suicide, reportedly due to stress experienced during multiple arrests, searches and the psychological pressure exercised by the police.⁸⁸

72. In 2024, 127 individuals were reportedly included on political grounds on the list of organizations and individuals involved in terrorist activities compiled by the KGB. In January 2025, the Viasna Human Rights Centre reported that a total of 71 persons had been convicted in Belarus under article 289 of the Criminal Code (“acts of terrorism”) for political reasons, including seven foreigners. Nine individuals had been convicted in absentia.⁸⁹ On 29 July 2024, the first trial began in the case of the teenage group “Black Nightingales”, whose members had been apprehended in March 2024 and accused of cooperation with Ukrainian security forces and the preparation of terrorist acts. The members of the group were aged between 16 and 19.⁹⁰

73. Together with other special procedure mandate holders, the Special Rapporteur brought to the attention of the authorities multiple allegations about intentional ill-treatment of prisoners included on the lists of individuals involved in extremist and terrorist activities.⁹¹ Concerns were also raised with the Government about the fact that prisoners designated as “terrorists” face severe restrictions or bans on receiving money transfers and packages, leaving them entirely dependent on penitentiary institutions for food, medicine, clothing and hygiene products; the supply of the essential items is reportedly insufficient for maintaining good health and hygiene. Regretfully, the Government did not provide any meaningful response to these allegations, ignoring the queries from the special procedure mandate holders about the grounds for including the names of specific individuals on the aforementioned lists and about the legal consequences of such inclusion.

74. Communications were also addressed to the Government raising concerns about the designation of human rights NGOs and their materials as “extremist” and retaliation against individuals who share data with “extremist” NGOs,⁹² as well as about convictions in absentia on extremist and terrorist charges without fair trial guarantees.⁹³

⁸⁴ In 2023, the previous Special Rapporteur examined this trend in her report to the General Assembly (A/78/327).

⁸⁵ See <https://nashaniva.com/ru/356075> (in Russian).

⁸⁶ There appear to be some discrepancies in the statistics. In May 2024, the Investigative Committee announced having recorded 19,000 such crimes since August 2020, see <https://euroradio.fm/ru/s-avgusta-2020-go-v-belarusi-vyyavili-19-tysyach-ekstremistskikh-prestupleniy-sk> (in Russian).

⁸⁷ See <https://www.mvd.gov.by/ru/news/8642> (in Russian).

⁸⁸ See <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/85772.html?c> (in Russian).

⁸⁹ See <https://spring96.org/en/news/117182>.

⁹⁰ See <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/istorii-molodyh-lyudey-kotoryh-v-belarusi-obvinyayut-v-gosizmene/33059288.html> (in Russian).

⁹¹ See communications BLR 5/2024; BLR 6/2024; and BLR 2/2025.

⁹² See communications BLR 4/2024; and BLR9/2024.

⁹³ See communication BLR 8/2024.

75. Growing concern surrounds the alleged multiple restrictions on the human rights of former prisoners designated as “extremists” and “terrorists”. The individuals on the list of “terrorists” are reportedly not allowed to have SIM cards or bank accounts and are prevented from engaging in basic financial transactions, such as paying for their apartments. While a few individuals have been removed from the government lists, the procedure for removal remains opaque and effective remedies appear to be lacking.

76. Notwithstanding the fact that special procedure mandate holders repeatedly raised concerns with the Government about the incompatibility of its anti-extremist legal framework with its obligations under international human rights law, Belarus continued supplementing it with new laws and regulations that may be used to impose further human rights violations.

77. On 30 December 2024, the Council of Ministers adopted a new resolution on the procedure for recognizing children at risk and in need of state protection (resolution No. 1055), which allows the Government to take children into custody if their family members have been prosecuted under extremist charges. According to the new resolution, children are considered to be in a “socially dangerous situation” if their parents or other persons involved in their upbringing lead “an immoral lifestyle”, if they have been convicted under article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences (“distribution, manufacture, storage, transportation of information products containing calls for extremist activity or propagandizing such activity”). This provision prohibits, *inter alia*, the distribution of information products on the list of extremist materials, including independent media and information from human rights NGOs. In 2024, at least 2,000 persons were reportedly convicted on administrative charges under this provision.

78. On 25 February 2025, together with several other special procedure mandate holders, the Special Rapporteur addressed a letter⁹⁴ to Belarusian authorities expressing concern about the bill “on amendments to laws on ensuring children’s rights”, which was adopted at first reading on 7 February 2025 by the House of Representatives of the National Assembly. The bill bans individuals convicted for “crimes of an extremist nature” from engaging in “pedagogical activity” or “pedagogical activity in the field of physical education and sports”, and “holding positions associated with the exercise of educational functions” or other positions “associated with regular work with children”.

J. Persecution of LGBTQ+ persons

79. From August through October 2024, 32 individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ persons were reportedly detained in various towns in what appeared as an unprecedented act of repression against this community. According to allegations received, LGBTQ+ persons currently risk being apprehended for mere participation in community chats, even those unrelated to activism. Criminal cases are reportedly increasingly initiated against LGBTQ+ persons based on article 343 of the Criminal Code (“creation and distribution of pornography”, punishable by up to four years in prison) merely for posting their photos online, fully dressed and without engaging in sexual acts. Reports have also emerged about arbitrary detentions and threats directed against the parents of LGBTQ+ persons in exile.

80. This wave of repression followed the adoption by the Ministry of Culture of Decree No. 24 of 19 March 2024, which broadened the definition of “pornography” to include “non-traditional sexual relations and (or) sexual behaviour”, such as homosexual and bisexual relations, “the wearing of clothes of the opposite sex mainly to achieve sexual arousal and to evoke an image of the person of the opposite sex (fetishistic transvestism)” and “the desire to live and be perceived by others as a person of the opposite sex, usually accompanied by a sense of discomfort with one’s anatomical sex or feelings of inappropriateness of one’s gender (transsexualism)”.

81. The bill against “propaganda for non-traditional family relations”, presented in February 2024 by the Prosecutor General,⁹⁵ has not yet been adopted, but it has not yet been formally abandoned.

⁹⁴ See communication BLR 1/2025.

⁹⁵ A/HRC/56/65, para. 65.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

82. The Special Rapporteur deplores the fact that the human rights situation in Belarus remains extremely concerning, with repressive measures targeting both individuals inside the country and Belarusian citizens in exile.

83. The presidential election of 26 January 2025, which resulted in the re-election of President Aliaksandr Lukashenka for a seventh term, cannot be considered as a genuine periodic election under article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Like the 2024 parliamentary elections, it was conducted without any possibility for the political opposition to campaign, without independent election observation, with no independent media coverage and without an opportunity for Belarusians in exile to exercise their voting rights.

84. Belarus continues to live under the shadow of repression following the previous presidential election of 9 August 2020, which was marked by credible claims of widespread electoral fraud and the brutal repression of peaceful protests.⁹⁶ During the period under review, the authorities continued to detain, prosecute, submit to ill-treatment and otherwise punish those who protested, supported or were perceived to have supported the political opposition in 2020. The Special Rapporteur is appalled by the ruthlessness and the reach of the ongoing repression, which has targeted individuals inside and outside the country for acts committed up to five years ago, including retaliation against family members and solidarity initiatives.

85. While welcoming the release of over 200 individuals identified by civil society as political prisoners, the continuing repression and the remaining high number of individuals identified by human rights defenders as political prisoners prevent the Special Rapporteur from concluding that there has been an improvement in the general situation in the area of civil and political rights in Belarus.

86. The Special Rapporteur takes note of the recent findings of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus⁹⁷ and concurs with its recommendations.⁹⁸ He also supports the recommendations issued to Belarus over the past year by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,⁹⁹ the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,¹⁰⁰ the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women¹⁰¹ and the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations.¹⁰²

87. The Special Rapporteur encourages the international community to support the United Nations human rights mechanisms and Belarusian civil society, including organizations stripped of legal recognition in Belarus. He urges Member States to continue engaging in advocacy with the authorities of Belarus to promote human rights-based solutions to the pressing issues identified in the present report.

88. The Special Rapporteur reiterates the recommendations made in the reports of his predecessor, Anaïs Marin. In addition, he recommends that the Government of Belarus:

- (a) Establish full and meaningful cooperation with the special procedure mandate holders, including by responding to all questions made in their communications and ensuring protection from reprisals for anyone engaging with them;

⁹⁶ See, inter alia, [A/HRC/47/49](#) and [A/HRC/52/68](#).

⁹⁷ [A/HRC/58/68](#).

⁹⁸ https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Report%20III%28A%29-2025-%5BNORMES-241219-002%5D-EN_0.pdf, pp. 115–123.

⁹⁹ [CERD/C/BLR/CO/24-25](#).

¹⁰⁰ [CRPD/C/BLR/CO/1](#).

¹⁰¹ [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#).

¹⁰² https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Report%20III%28A%29-2025-%5BNORMES-241219-002%5D-EN_0.pdf, pp. 115–123.

(b) Immediately cease persecution in retaliation for the legitimate exercise of civil and political rights and release and rehabilitate all persons convicted on politically motivated charges;

(c) Launch prompt, effective, impartial and transparent investigations into all cases of ill-treatment in detention and deaths in custody identified by special procedure mandate holders and the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus and the findings of OHCHR about the commission of crimes against humanity in Belarus;

(d) Launch prompt, effective, impartial and transparent investigations into the deaths of third-country nationals at the Belarusian border with member States of the European Union;

(e) Immediately cease all incommunicado detentions, including those of Maksim Znak, Mikalai Statkevich, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Viktar Babaryka and Ihar Losik, and ensure regular and unrestricted communication of all inmates with their families and legal counsel of their choosing; and amend domestic legislation and law enforcement practices to allow for communication between inmates and lawyers on the latter's initiative;

(f) Put an immediate end to the practice of "penance videos" recorded with persons deprived of liberty and investigate whether the persons who have appeared in such videos have been subjected to ill-treatment;

(g) Establish independent monitoring of penitentiary institutions and efficient complaints mechanisms against ill-treatment in such institutions and ensure protection from retaliation for engaging with these mechanisms, investigate the alleged complicity of penitentiary administrations, the Department of Correctional Services and the Public Prosecutor's Office in covering up ill-treatment in penitentiary institutions and sanction those responsible;

(h) Abolish the discriminatory exclusion of persons convicted for "extremist-related activities" from the benefit of the exemptions from pretrial detention and imprisonment introduced by Law No. 61-Z of 17 February 2025;

(i) Repeal article 411 of the Criminal Code ("malicious disobedience to penitentiary administration") and immediately free and rehabilitate all individuals convicted under that provision;

(j) Abolish unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions on the freedom of movement and liberty as well as interference with the privacy of former prisoners under "nadzor" proceedings;

(k) Ensure the recognition of legal capacity and effective access to justice to all persons transferred for compulsory psychiatric treatment, in line with articles 12 and 13 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities, put an end to all incommunicado detentions in mental health facilities and ensure effective remedies for individuals held in these facilities to regularly challenge their compulsory treatment, with the support of legal counsel of their choosing;

(l) Immediately cease prosecutions in retaliation for trial monitoring and release and rehabilitate those convicted;

(m) Repeal the 2022 legislative amendments, which introduced in absentia criminal proceedings ("special proceedings") or amend the legislation and law enforcement practices to bring them into full compliance with article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as interpreted in general comment No. 32 of the Human Rights Committee; given the current absence of fair trial guarantees under these proceedings, overturn all criminal convictions imposed in absentia and provide effective reparation to persons targeted by such convictions;

(n) Cease the expropriations of properties belonging to individuals in exile and return all confiscated properties;

(o) Cease intimidation and prosecution of family members of persons recognized by NGOs as political prisoners and of persons in exile and repeal criminal and administrative sentences imposed for sharing and receiving humanitarian aid, including through the “INeedHelpBy” initiative;

(p) Revoke the constitutional and legislative amendments passed in 2022–2023, which excluded Belarusians abroad from the voting process and from running in presidential elections;

(q) Ensure full respect of the freedoms of expression, assembly and association, in line with articles 19, 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including in the media and in cultural and religious spheres; in particular, abolish the list of extremist materials and the list of publications “prone to harm national interests” compiled by the Ministry of Information and revoke the “extremist formation” status assigned to media outlets and independent associations;

(r) Bring the counter-terrorism and anti-extremism legal framework and law-enforcement practices into full compliance with international human rights law, in particular, abolish the lists of individuals and organizations involved in extremist activities run by the Ministry of Interior and cease prosecutions under terrorist and extremist charges for acts that amount to the legitimate exercise of civil and political rights, repeal resolution No.1055 passed by the Council of Ministers and abandon the draft law on “amendments to laws on ensuring children’s rights”;

(s) Repeal Decree No. 24, adopted on 19 March 2024 by the Ministry of Culture, cease harassment and persecution of LGBTQ+ persons and abandon the bill “against propaganda for non-traditional family relations”.
