



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
7 June 2012

English only

---

## Human Rights Council

Twentieth session

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

### **Written statement\* submitted by Liberal 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.

[1 June 2012]

---

\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **Intensification of human rights violations in the Republic of Belarus**

Liberal International (LI) welcomes the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Belarus submitted to the twentieth session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (OHCHR). The High Commissioner stressed the systematic nature of the deficiencies pertaining to human rights in the country such as the freedoms of association, assembly and expression as well as the right to a fair trial. She also emphasized that there is a lack of an independent judiciary and a national human rights institution.

Liberal International wishes to draw attention to the following on-going human rights violations in the Republic of Belarus which require the urgent attention of the international community:

### **Political Prisoners**

Liberal International also welcomes the recent release of two political prisoners by the Belarusian authorities: former presidential candidate Andrei Sannikau and his electioneering agent Dzmitry Bandarenka. LI is convinced that the latest strategy of the European Union to exercise direct political pressure on the Belarusian government is efficient and should be continued until all political prisoners, including former presidential candidate Mikalay Statkevich, are released and rehabilitated, and the government commits itself to serious democratic reforms and free elections. This strategy should be supported by other governments in the world.

LI is deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Belarus. The violent repression of political protests in the aftermath of the Presidential elections in 2010, the intensive crackdown on civil society organizations and especially human rights defenders, as well as the recent executions of two young Belarusians, are more than appalling.

LI strongly condemns the executions of Dmitry Konovalov and Vladislav Kovalyov, who were sentenced to death for a bomb attack at a metro station in 2011. LI expresses serious doubts about the legal process and human rights standards of their trial. LI considers the death penalty as incompatible with the respect for the inherent dignity of human life and it has called for the total abolishment of all forms of capital punishment throughout the world on numerous occasions in its resolutions.

LI deplores the political persecution of Siarhei Kavalenka and his recent conviction to a two year prison term following Mr. Kavalenka's public demonstration of hanging white-red-white flag, an alternative to the official Belarusian flag, on top of the main New Year's tree in Vitebsk on 7 January 2010. LI rejects the notion that such an action has resulted in any way in the disturbing of public order. LI is highly concerned with Mr. Kavalenka's health situation and his treatment in prison and demands his immediate release.

LI condemns the degrading treatment, punishment and arbitrary detention of all political prisoners; Based on information of Belarusian human rights organizations at least 13 people have been sentenced for political reasons to prison terms from 2 up to 8 years at the moment. There are reports that several of the prisoners were tortured and ill-treated.

### **Freedom of speech**

LI also deplores the fact that the Belarusian Ministry of Justice has issued a third warning to the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (one of the few human rights organizations still registered in Belarus) allowing for the suspension of its activities in relation to appeals the

Committee has sent to the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

LI expresses concern over the decision of the Qualification Commission of the Ministry of Justice to deprive Tamara Sidorenko, attorney of the former presidential candidates Vladimir Neklyayev and Ales Mikhalevich, of license to practice law in Belarus without adhering to the required re-assessment procedure first.

LI strongly condemns the arrest of Ales Bialiatski, the founder of the Belarusian Human Rights Center "Viasna" and Nobel Peace Prize Candidate, and finds the allegations of tax fraud which have been brought against him as unfounded.

Liberal International expresses concern about the conclusions of the Committee on International Control over the general human rights situation in Belarus. According to the Committee's report the pressure on human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers has continued. There is also a continued pressure on the part of the Belarusian state on the civil society sector

LI finds the conclusions of Viasna's Review Chronicle of Human Rights Violations in Belarus published in April 2012 particularly worrying as they state that "the tendency towards the restriction of the civil and political activity of political opponents including former political prisoners has strengthened."

### **Freedom of assembly**

Liberal International stresses that all street actions except the "Freedom Day" and "Chernobyl Way" rallies in Minsk were banned.

LI notes that holding the World Ice Hockey Championship in Belarus will legitimize Belarusian authorities who perpetrate serious human rights violations and send the wrong message to the leadership in the country.

As freedoms of expression, association and assembly are a core value for all who believe in open international cooperation and exchange, including in the field of sport, we believe that every individual should have the right to express freely his or her political convictions. We also strongly believe in open and inclusive societies, where people's fundamental choices are protected and where there is a strong sense of respect for basic democratic values.

LI is strongly convinced that the current conditions in Belarus as described above constitute a serious risk for organizing credible and open international sports championships in the country. All indications point out that this sports event can and will be used by the authorities to further suspend freedom of expression and assembly.

LI condemns the suppression of civil society and the partial prohibition of non-governmental organizations as well as the fact that opposition parties have been declared illegal or threatened with this fate in the near future.

Liberal International expresses concern about the democratic deficit, the flaws of the electoral process; the persistence of human rights violations; the travel ban which in practice imprisons more than 100000 people within their own settlements; the virtual absence of a civil society; the fact that the independence of the judiciary is doubtful; local government is underdeveloped and parliament has little power.

LI expresses regret over the fact that several LI members working to promote freedom and democracy in Belarus were denied entry into the country without an explanation.

Liberal International stresses that all these abuses are evidence of the lack of democratic institutions and of the rule of law which characterizes daily life in Belarus.

### **Right to safe and clean environment**

LI is deeply concerned with the growing environmental pollution of air, land and water by excessive and environmentally detrimental methods of potash mining. This adds on the serious concern of the remaining nuclear and chemical pollution from the Chernobyl disaster that Belarusian authorities continue to neglect. Keeping in mind that health and right to safe and clean environment have been recognized as a fundamental human right, the official state disregard of these issues amounts to intentional violation of human rights.

### **Liberal International recalls**

- The fact that Belarus is the only European country which is outside the Council of Europe due to undemocratic and authoritarian policies of the Belarusian authorities.
- Its resolutions on Belarus adopted at its Congresses in Ottawa (2000), Budapest (2002), Dakar (2003), Marrakech (2006), Belfast (2008), Cairo (2009) and Manila (2011) and its Executive Committee Meetings in San Jose (2004) and Barcelona (2012) in which Liberal International has called for:
  - Continued pressure on the Belarusian authorities to release anyone detained for the expression of critical views regarding the government and to avoid the reappearance of the practice of imprisonment of political opponents.
  - Observance of the basic tenets of democracy and human rights and respect the right of every Belarusian citizen to freedom of expression, assembly and association.
- Its joint statement together with the Liberal Group in the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (ALDE-PACE), the European Liberal Democrats (ELDR), and the Liberal Group in the European Parliament (ALDE-EP) on the situation in Belarus after the elections in 2010 in which LI strongly condemned the violent repression of political protesters.

### **Liberal International calls**

- For the empowerment of the existing democratic parties and civil society groups, which are rooted in and supported by the society itself but have only limited political rights and opportunity to establish a sustainable position in the public system of Belarus.
- For the ending of all cooperation between western governments, businesses, industries and Belarusian State companies that are linked to the Belarusian government.
- On the Government of Belarus to put a moratorium on capital punishment in place, with the goal of eliminating it completely. Belarus is the only country in Europe conducting this cruel and inhumane punishment.
- On the Belarusian government to cease, instantly and unequivocally, any persecution and suppression of political opposition and of civil society.
- On the need for the Belarusian authorities to develop a clear roadmap for democratic reform and free and fair elections.