



**Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Belarus
50th Session**

Human Rights Watch

April, 2025

Summary

1. Human Rights Watch (HRW) submits the following with respect to Belarus's implementation of recommendations received during its 2020 Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This submission is neither a complete review of implementation of all recommendations, nor a comprehensive review of Belarus's respect, protection and fulfillment of human rights in the domestic sphere.
2. Since Belarus's last UPR cycle in November 2020, the human rights situation has significantly deteriorated. Despite formally supporting recommendations on the protection of peaceful assembly, freedom of opinion and expression, access to information, and the need for accountability for and prevention of torture and ill-treatment in places of detention,¹ the Belarusian government engaged in widespread and systematic violations against critics, rather than implement those recommendations.
3. Between July 2024 and January 2025, the government - by way of an amnesty and presidential pardons - released 240 persons who had been convicted on politically motivated charges (political prisoners for the purpose of this submission).² However, at least 1,208 political prisoners remain behind bars, and politically motivated prosecutions continue.³

Right to Peaceful Assembly and Crackdown on Peaceful Protests

4. During its previous UPR cycle, Belarus supported several states' recommendations in relation to ensuring the right to peaceful assembly, including "by ensuring that peaceful demonstrators are not persecuted, intimidated, imprisoned, ill-treated or tortured"⁴ and refraining from "the disproportionate use of force against people exercising their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly."⁵
5. In November 2020, using excessive force, Belarusian authorities detained at least 1,053 people in connection with peaceful protests, mostly in Minsk. Hundreds were charged with breaching public gathering regulations and sentenced to fines or arrest.⁶
6. Belarusian police continued brutally dispersing peaceful protests into early 2021 until they largely wound down. Police arbitrarily detained people for wearing or exhibiting the white-red-white stripe pattern associated with the protest

¹ UN Human Rights Council, Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Belarus, A/HRC/46/5/Add.1, March 5, 2021, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/46/5/Add.1> (accessed April 3, 2025).

² Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2025), Belarus chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/belarus> (accessed April 3, 2025).

³ "Viasna" Human Rights Center, Political prisoners in Belarus, <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>, (accessed April 3, 2025).

⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Belarus, A/HRC/46/5, January 4, 2021, Recommendation 138.159 <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/46/5>, (accessed April 3, 2025).

⁵ Ibid, Recommendation 138.143.

⁶ Anastasiia Kruope (Human Rights Watch), Crackdown on Peaceful Protesters Escalates in Belarus, November 9, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/09/crackdown-peaceful-protesters-escalates-belarus>, (accessed April 3, 2025).

movement and charged them with violating regulations on demonstrations even if they were detained during raids on apartment buildings.⁷

7. Between November 2020 and March 2025, authorities continued prosecutions over the 2020 protests, including against critics returning from abroad. Tens of thousands were sentenced to fines and short-term arrests; many experienced ill-treatment in custody.⁸ At least 3,277 faced criminal charges.⁹
8. In March 2021, authorities toughened sanctions for violating public gathering regulations. In June 2021, a set of amendments to the law on demonstrations entered into force, requiring official permission for any public gathering. Later that month, authorities introduced criminal liability for joining at least two unauthorized protests over a year. They also toughened sanctions for calls for participation in unauthorized protests and broadly defined extremist crimes.¹⁰
9. In February 2022, authorities held a referendum on constitutional amendments, which human rights groups deemed non-transparent and illegitimate.¹¹ On the day of the referendum police detained hundreds over peaceful protests against the war in Ukraine and subjected them to beatings and other forms of ill-treatment. In the ensuing months, police routinely detained people for anti-war insignia.

Recommendations:

- Stop prosecutions over participation in peaceful protests; release and rehabilitate all imprisoned protesters;
- Amend national legislation in line with relevant international standards and lift all undue obstacles to exercising freedom of assembly.

Freedom of Opinion and Expression & Access to information

Crackdown on independent journalism

10. During its last UPR cycle, Belarus supported recommendations on guaranteeing media freedom and independence, including recommendations on ensuring protection and safety of journalists and media workers, including foreign media, as well as refraining from interference and censorship.¹²

⁷ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2022), Belarus chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/belarus> (accessed April 3, 2025).

⁸ “Viasna” Human Rights Center, At least 46,700 detained: administrative persecution in numbers three years after post-election protests (Не менее 46 700 задержанных: административное преследование в цифрах за три года после выборов протестов), August 9, 2023, <https://spring96.org/ru/news/112439> (accessed April 3, 2025).

⁹ “Viasna” Human Rights Center, More than 3,270 people sentenced for participating in protests against falsified election results in 2020 (Более 3270 человек осудили за участие в протестах против фальсифицированных результатов выборов в 2020 году), January 22, 2025, <https://spring96.org/ru/news/117222>, (accessed April 3, 2025).

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022. Belarus chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/belarus>.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2023), Belarus chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/belarus> (accessed April 3, 2025).

¹² UN Human Rights Council, Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Belarus, A/HRC/46/5/Add.1, March 5, 2021, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/46/5/Add.1>.

11. Between November 2020 and March 2021, authorities carried out unprecedented violations against independent journalists, subjecting them to arbitrary detentions, ill-treatment, arbitrary fines, and unwarranted prison sentences on politically motivated charges. Authorities also revoked their media credentials and raided their homes and offices.¹³ Dozens of journalists were targeted as witnesses and suspects in trumped up criminal cases and subjected to house searches, interrogations, and harassment. At least four reported beatings in custody, inhumane detention conditions and denial of medical assistance.
12. In December 2020, a Minsk court revoked the media license of leading independent online media TUT.BY over allegedly spreading “false information.” In May 2021, police searched TUT.BY’s offices, raided the homes of at least five staff, and detained at least 13 staff on spurious “grand tax evasion” charges.¹⁴ In June 2022, the Supreme Court designated TUT.BY “an extremist organization.” Three TUT.BY’s staff, including the editor-in-chief Maryna Zolatava, were imprisoned on bogus criminal charges; and at least nine more were suspects in a politically motivated criminal case.¹⁵
13. In February 2021, a Minsk court sentenced journalist Katsiaryna Andreieva (Bakhvalova) and her colleague Daria Chultsova to two years in prison for “organizing activities violating public order.” The case against them stemmed from their live stream of a protest in Minsk in November 2020.¹⁶ In July 2022, a Homiel court found also Andreieva guilty of high treason, increasing her total imprisonment sentence to eight years and three months.¹⁷
14. In March 2021, TUT.BY’s correspondent Katsiaryna Barysevich and medical doctor Artsiom Sarokin were sentenced to six months and two years (with one-year suspended), respectively, for “disclosing medical data” in an article about the death of a peaceful protester, Raman Bandarenka, as a result of a severe beating by police.¹⁸
15. In June 2021, a set of amendments to the media law entered into force, further expanding official grounds for revoking accreditations and blocking media websites. Amendments prohibited livestreams of unauthorized mass protests and outlawed publications that “discredit” the state.¹⁹

¹³ Human Rights Watch, Belarus: Crackdown on Independent Journalism, March 29, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/29/belarus-crackdown-independent-journalism> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

¹⁴ Anastasiia Kruope (Human Rights Watch), Belarusian Authorities Move to Silence Leading Media Outlet, May 19, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/19/belarusian-authorities-move-silence-leading-media-outlet> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, Belarus chapter.

¹⁶ Anastasiia Kruope (Human Rights Watch), Two Journalists in Belarus Jailed in Retaliation for Their Work, February 18, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/18/two-journalists-belarus-jailed-retaliation-their-work> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, Belarus chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/belarus>.

¹⁸ Viasna” Human Rights Center, “Zero promise” case: Sentence delivered to journalist Barysevich and doctor Sorokin (Дело “ноль промилле”: Вынесли приговоры журналистке Борисевич и врачу Сорокину), March 2, 2021, <https://spring96.org/ru/news/102226> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022. Belarus chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/belarus>.

16. Authorities labeled independent media outlets and social media channels as "extremist" and used charges of "dissemination of extremist materials" to prosecute people for sharing and commenting on their publications."²⁰

Freedom to express dissenting opinion

17. During the last UPR cycle, Belarus supported several recommendations on ensuring the freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of speech and access to information.²¹
18. Over the past five years, authorities have used a variety of charges to prosecute their critics, including "defamation" charges for insulting the Belarusian president, government or state symbols, and charges of "inciting enmity" against the "social group of law enforcement officers" or "violent acts or threat of violence against law enforcement officers." Authorities widely used charges related to "extremism" and "terrorism" against critics for actions such as leaving critical comments on social media, following "extremist" Telegram channels, or having a white-red-white tattoo.²²
19. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Belarusian authorities systematically prosecuted war critics.²³

Internet shutdowns and blockings

20. Despite supporting Norway's recommendation to ensure "unfettered access to the Internet,"²⁴ Belarus continued hindering access to the internet in response to the protests in 2020 and carried out illegitimate blockings of independent sources.
21. In November 2020, Internet service providers notified their users in Minsk that internet access would be restricted, as ordered by the government amidst mass protests.²⁵
22. Authorities blocked dozens of independent media,²⁶ including, at least two TUT.BY websites in May 2021.²⁷

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, Belarus chapter;

Human Rights Watch, Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, Right to Defence (defendersbelarus.org), "*I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully*," May 27, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/05/27/i-swear-fulfill-duties-defense-lawyer-honestly-and-faithfully/politically> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

²¹ UN Human Rights Council, Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Belarus, A/HRC/46/5/Add.1, March 5, 2021, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/46/5/Add.1> (accessed April 3, 2025).

²² Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2024), Belarus chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/belarus> (accessed April 3, 2025).

²³ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024, Belarus chapter.

²⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Belarus, A/HRC/46/5, January 4, 2021, Recommendation 138.172 <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/46/5>, (accessed April 3, 2025).

²⁵ Anastasiia Kruope (human rights watch), Crackdown on Peaceful Protesters Escalates in Belarus, November 9, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/09/crackdown-peaceful-protesters-escalates-belarus> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, Belarus chapter.

²⁷ Anastasiia Kruope (Human Rights Watch), Belarusian Authorities Move to Silence Leading Media Outlet.

23. In December 2021, a court in Homiel designated the website and social media pages of Viasna, a leading human rights group, as “extremist,” which led to their blocking. Authorities also blocked the website of another prominent rights group Human Constanta.²⁸ In April 2022, Belarus’s Prosecutor General announced the blocking of Human Rights Watch’s website.²⁹

24. In April 2024, Operation and Analysis Center under the president of Belarus was authorized to disconnect “extremist” websites from the country’s national domain system (.by), effectively shutting them down.³⁰

Recommendations:

- Ensure access to information without arbitrary censorship of legitimate information, including online.
- Ensure that people can express their opinions online freely and without fear of retaliation.
- Ensure that journalists can do their work without fear of retaliation, including by bringing national legislation in line with international standards.

Harassment of Human Rights Defenders, Opposition Activists, Civil Society Groups, and Lawyers

Human Rights Defenders

25. In its previous UPR cycle, Belarus supported recommendations calling on the government to respect the rights of and protect human rights defenders.³¹

26. In February 2021, authorities rounded up at least 40 human rights defenders and journalists and searched their homes and offices.³² In July 2021, police in at least ten cities searched homes and offices of the country’s leading rights organizations and their staff, detaining and interrogating at least 11 human rights defenders and journalists as a part of the criminal investigation into 2020 protests.³³

27. In July 2021, Aliaksandr Lukashenka announced a “purge” on Belarusian civil society.³⁴ Authorities moved to shut-down over a thousand independent

²⁸ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, Belarus chapter.

²⁹ Anastasiia Kruope (Human Rights Watch), Belarus Blocks Human Rights Watch Website, April 6, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/06/belarus-blocks-human-rights-watch-website> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025, Belarus chapter.

³¹ UN Human Rights Council, Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Belarus, March 5, 2021, Recommendations 138.146; 138.162, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/46/5/Add.1> (accessed April 3, 2025).

³² Human Rights Watch, Belarus: Crackdown Escalates, February 17, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/17/belarus-crackdown-escalates> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

³³ Human Rights Watch, Belarus: Unprecedented Raids on Human Rights Defenders, July 15, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/15/belarus-unprecedented-raids-human-rights-defenders> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

³⁴ Tanya Lokshina, Rachel Denber (Human Rights Watch), Belarus Authorities Launch Purge of Civic Groups, July 23, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/23/belarus-authorities-launch-purge-civic-groups> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

organizations.³⁵ In January 2022, new legislation entered into force, reintroducing criminal liability for participation in activities of unregistered organizations, punishable with up to two years in prison.³⁶

28. Seven Viasna staff faced criminal prosecution and five remained behind bars in March 2025, including the group's leader Ales Bialiatski (ten years in prison), vice-chair Valentin Stefanovich (9 years), lawyer Uladzimir Labkovich (7 years), volunteer Andrei Chapiuk (six years) and volunteers network coordinator Marfa Rabkova (15 years).³⁷
29. In February 2021, leading disabilities rights activist Siarhei Drazdouski and lawyer Aleh Hrableuski spent six months under house arrest and in jail, respectively, on spurious fraud charges.
30. In March 2023, a court in Minsk sentenced policy analyst Tatiana Kouzina to ten years in prison on politically motivated charges.³⁸
31. In June 2023, the Minsk City Court sentenced human rights defender Nasta (Anastasia) Loika to seven years in prison for "inciting enmity" for her report documenting rights violations perpetrated by police. Loika had served six arbitrary administrative arrest sentences prior to facing criminal charges. Authorities subjected her to torture and other forms of inhumane treatment, forced her to record "confession" videos, vilified her in smear campaigns, searched her mother's home, and disbarred her lawyers.³⁹
32. In September 2021, the Supreme Court upheld the government's move to liquidate the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, one of the country's oldest rights groups.⁴⁰
33. In March 2023, authorities designated the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) and staff an "extremist formation."⁴¹ On August 27, the Supreme Court ruled to strip BAJ of its official registration.⁴²

Trade Unions

³⁵ Lawtrend, Forcible liquidation of NGOs 2021-2025 (Принудительная ликвидация НКО 2021-2025), https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1qHDjDaoq1Fz9TnVsbTlh-sFbWP_4U1faraytI8AuKXM/edit?gid=o#gid=o (Accessed April 3, 2025).

³⁶ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, Belarus chapter.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022, Belarus chapter.

³⁸ Tanya Lokshina, Another Critic Detained in Belarus on Undisclosed Charges, July 8, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/08/another-critic-detained-belarus-undisclosed-charges> (Accessed April 3, 2025); "Viasna" Human Rights Center, Tatsiana Kouzina, <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en/person/taccjana-kuzina> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

³⁹ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024, Belarus chapter.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, Belarus: Authorities Target Top Human Rights Group, September 29, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/29/belarus-authorities-target-top-human-rights-group> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

⁴¹ Anastasiia Kruope (Human Rights Watch), Belarus Equates Rights Protection to Extremism, March 10, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/10/belarus-equates-rights-protection-extremism> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

⁴² Anastasiia Kruope (human Rights Watch), Belarusian Authorities "Liquidate" Leading Media Freedom Organization, August 30, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/30/belarusian-authorities-liquidate-leading-media-freedom-organization> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

34. In April 2022, authorities raided offices of several independent trade unions, detaining at least 14 activists over “activities gravely violating public order.” In July, the Supreme Court shut down four major independent trade unions and the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions.⁴³ Between October 2022 and October 2023, authorities prosecuted at least 24 trade union members on politically motivated charges.⁴⁴

Opposition Politicians

35. In July 2021, the Supreme Court sentenced Viktor Babarika, one of the former presidential contenders, to 14 years in prison on charges of “grand bribery” and “large-scale laundering of illicit funds.” In July 2023, Eduard Babaryka his son Eduard Babaryka, who worked for his campaign, was sentenced to eight years in prison for “tax evasion,” “enmity incitement,” and “aiding activities gravely violating public order.”⁴⁵
36. In December 2021, a court in Homiel sentenced former presidential contender Siarhei Tsikhanouski to 18 years in prison over “organizing mass protests.” The other five defendants in the case, including opposition politician Mikalay Statkevich and Radio Free Europe consultant Ihar Losik, received 14-to-16-year prison sentences.⁴⁶
37. In February 2023, a court in Zhodino handed down an additional one-and-a-half-year sentence to Tsikhanouski.⁴⁷
38. In September 2021, a Minsk court sentenced Maryia Kalesnikava and Maksim Znak, members of the presidium of the opposition’s Coordination Council, to 11 and 10 years’ in prison, respectively, on charges of “conspiracy to seize power” and “calls for actions aimed at harming national security.”⁴⁸ While in pretrial detention, Kalesnikava reported threats and ill-treatment.⁴⁹
39. In November 2023, law enforcement officers carried out over 100 raids in connection with elections to the opposition’s Coordination Council. Following the raids, 20 exiled activists, journalists, and academics were sentenced in absentia for purported affiliation with the opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. In May, when the election to the Council took place, authorities opened criminal cases against 257 people whose names were on the list of candidates.⁵⁰

Lawyers

⁴³ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, Belarus chapter.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024, Belarus chapter.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024, Belarus chapter.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, Belarus chapter.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024, Belarus chapter.

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022, Belarus chapter.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch, Belarus: Stop Ill-Treatment of Opposition Politician, June 12, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/12/belarus-stop-ill-treatment-opposition-politician> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025, Belarus chapter.

40. Over the past five years, Belarusian lawyers representing clients in politically motivated cases or speaking out on rights abuses faced systematic repression as the government took control over the legal profession.⁵¹
41. More than 140 lawyers lost their license following politically motivated disbarment by the regional bar associations or license revocation by the Justice Ministry.⁵²
42. Authorities denied lawyers access to their clients and recorded confidential attorney-client conversations. Authorities also forced lawyers to sign broad nondisclosure agreements and arbitrarily closed trials to the public, preventing lawyers from sharing case materials with independent experts or exposing abuses against their clients.⁵³
43. Between September 2020 and May 2024, authorities arbitrarily arrested at least 23 lawyers and used those arrests as a pretext to suspend them from representing their clients and to revoke their licenses. Many lawyers suffered arbitrarily detentions, interrogations and other forms of harassment.⁵⁴
44. In March 2025, at least six human rights lawyers—Maksim Znak, Aliaksandr Danilevich, Vital Brahinet, Anastasiya Lazarenka, Yuliya Yurhilevich, and Aliaksei Barodka—were serving politically motivated six-to-ten-year prison sentences.
45. In some cases, lawyers experienced beatings, other ill-treatment and torture, including threats of sexual assault, law enforcement officials, including riot police, security agents, and officers at local police precincts.
46. In November 2021, amendments to the law on the bar entered into force, requiring all practicing lawyers to be employed by regional bar associations controlled by the Justice Ministry.

Recommendations:

- Release immediately and unconditionally human rights defenders, lawyers, trade union members, opposition politicians, journalists, and others convicted in retaliation for exercising their civil and political rights and guarantee that they can carry out their work without fear of reprisal.

Torture, Ill-treatment and Accountability

47. In November, 2020, a group of apparent plain-clothed law enforcement officers severely beat Raman Bandarenka, when he was trying to protect a mural, a local

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, Right to Defence (defendersbelarus.org), *"I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully."*

⁵² Human Rights Watch, Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, Right to Defence (defendersbelarus.org), *"I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully."*

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

symbol of peaceful protest movement, from government sponsored assailants.⁵⁵ One day later, Bandarenka died of severe brain injuries.⁵⁶ Authorities denied the police involvement, claiming Bandarenka had been found drunk on the street.

48. In August 2021, the Belarusian Investigative Committee completed their preliminary inquiry into the allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of peaceful protesters by law enforcement officers in August 2020 and stated that they found no grounds for launching criminal investigations into the 4,644 claims.⁵⁷
49. Since November 2020, political prisoners continued to face torture and ill-treatment, including in pre-trial custody and penal colonies.⁵⁸ Law enforcement officers routinely forced detainees in politically motivated cases to “repent” for their “crimes” on camera.⁵⁹
50. At least seven political prisoners, including Babaryka, Tsikhanouski, and Losik, have been held incommunicado since February-April 2023. Kalesnikava was held incommunicado for extended periods of time.⁶⁰
51. Prison officials restricted political prisoners’ access to correspondence, calls, parcels, and meetings with lawyers and family. Prisoners faced isolation in punishment cells and arbitrarily harsh confinement regime. Dozens of political prisoners in 2024 faced new trumped-up charges, which served to prolong their sentences.

Recommendations:

- Ensure absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, immediately cease the practice of incommunicado detention, and bring detention conditions in line with international standards.
- Issue a standing invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to visit places of detention under conditions set out by the Special Rapporteur and cooperate fully on all visits and recommendations.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and establish an independent national

⁵⁵ “Viasna” Human Rights Center, Ales Bialiatski: “MIA is responsible for death of Raman Bandarenka” (Алесь Бяляцкий: “Ответственность за смерть Романа Бондаренко лежит на МВД”), November 12, 2020, <https://spring96.org/ru/news/100384> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

⁵⁶ Anastasiia Kruope (Human Rights Watch), Man Killed for Protecting Symbols of Peaceful Protests in Belarus, November 13, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/13/man-killed-protecting-symbols-peaceful-protests-belarus> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022. Belarus chapter.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch, Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, Right to Defence (defendersbelarus.org), *“I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.”*

“Viasna” Human Rights Center, Criminal prosecution for political reasons Belarus 2021-2022 (Minsk, 2022), https://spring96.org/files/book/en/2022_politically_motivated_criminal_prosecutions_en.pdf (Accessed April 3, 2025);

“Viasna” Human Rights Center, Detention and penitentiary facilities of Belarus: 2020-2021 (Minsk, 2022), https://spring96.org/files/book/en/detention_and_penitentiary_2020_2021.pdf (Accessed April 3, 2025).

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch, Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers, Right to Defence (defendersbelarus.org), *“I Swear to Fulfill the Duties of Defense Lawyer Honestly and Faithfully.”*

⁶⁰ Ibid; Human Rights Watch, Belarus: Stop Ill-Treatment of Opposition Politician.

prevention mechanism and cooperate fully with the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture.

- Ratify the Rome Statute and implement the statute in national legislation, including by incorporating provisions to cooperate promptly and fully with the International Criminal Court.

Crackdown on Belarusians in Exile

52. Since September 2022, authorities initiated scores of “special procedure” criminal cases against opposition politicians, human rights defenders, and other critics. The “special procedure” is applicable to crimes under 43 different articles of the criminal code and allows for trials in absentia.⁶¹
53. In July 2022, amendments to the citizenship law entered into force, allowing the president to strip Belarusians abroad of their citizenship if convicted, including in absentia, of “participation in an extremist organization” or “grave harm to the interests of Belarus.”⁶²
54. In September 2022, Lukashenko signed a decree abolishing the authority of consulates and diplomatic missions to issue, replace, or extend passports or identification cards of Belarusians abroad.⁶³
55. In June and July 2023, law enforcement officers raided the homes of 21 exiled independent journalists and forced their family members to record videos condemning them.⁶⁴

Recommendations:

- Stop the practice of politically motivated prosecutions and other acts of repression against activists in exile and their family members.

Humanitarian Crisis and Violence at Belarus-Poland Border

56. In 2021, Belarusian authorities orchestrated a humanitarian crisis by facilitating tourist visas to thousands of migrants to encourage them to travel to the European Union borders. Pushed back to Belarus at the EU borders, migrants suffered serious abuses, including beatings and at least one instance of rape by Belarusian border guards and other security agents. Belarusian authorities prevented them from leaving the border areas, forcing them to repeatedly attempt crossing into the EU. Hundreds were stuck in limbo for weeks and months in circumstances that put their lives at risk.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, Belarus: New Laws Target Critics in Exile, December 22, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/22/belarus-new-laws-target-critics-exile>, (Accessed April 3, 2025).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch, Belarus: Decree Puts Exiled Citizens at Risk, September 8, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/08/belarus-decree-puts-exiled-citizens-risk> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025, Belarus chapter.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Die Here or Go to Poland,” November 24, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/11/24/die-here-or-go-poland/belarus-and-polands-shared-responsibility-border-abuses> (Accessed April 3, 2025).

57. In the following years, the humanitarian crisis at the European Union borders continued. Migrants, including children, continued to be stuck on the Belarusian side of the border, facing abuses by officials and risk of death.⁶⁶

Recommendations:

- Stop instrumentalizing migrants and end their ill-treatment at the border.

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, Belarus chapter.