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There was no improvement in the human rights situation in Belarus in the first half of 2015.

Belarus presented its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to the UN on 4 May 2015. Belarus confirmed that it would continue not to recognise the mandate of UN special measures, including that of the UN Special Rapporteur. The delegation from Belarus also repeated that they did not recognise the force of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Other UN countries had the opportunity to present a statement in response to the Belarus UPR. Many statements focused on the need for a National Human Rights Institution, abolition of the death penalty, for Belarus to sign up to conventions against torture, and to do more to protect against discrimination of all forms.

The UN Special Rapporteur, Mr Miklos Haraszti, presented his latest report at the UN Human Rights Council on 23 June 2015, in which he highlighted the systemic denial of human rights in Belarus. His report emphasised the denial of the right of freedom of expression, assembly and association, particularly the arbitrary registration process for mass events and civil society organisations.

Belarus maintains the death penalty, and the authorities do not provide notification of the date of an execution. At the beginning of 2015, there was only one prisoner, Mr Eduard Lykow, awaiting execution of his death sentence. Mr Lykow was sentenced on 25 November 2013, and his appeal was rejected in April 2014. The Gomel Regional Court passed a death sentence on 21-year-old Mr Siarhei Ivanou on 18 March 2015. Mr Ivanou was convicted of murdering a 19-year-old woman in 2013, in addition to other charges including robbery. The EU issued a statement condemning the death sentence.

At the beginning of 2015, there were still a number of political prisoners held in prison in Belarus. One, Mr Mikhail Dziadok, was sentenced to an extra year in prison for violating prison rules. He was due to be released on 3 March 2015, but will now serve until March 2016. He was placed in solitary confinement at the beginning of his new term and cut himself in protest. Mr Nikolai Statkevich, a former presidential candidate, was moved from an open prison to a higher security institution. He was also placed in solitary confinement for breaking prison rules.

A new law regulating all forms of media was introduced on 1 January 2015. The new law enables the government to shut down any mass media outlets, including online media, if they publish content it deems "unsuitable" (of which there is no definition). Media outlets are given a warning for a first offence, and will then be closed down after a second offence. A number of independent media outlets have received first warnings. In June 2015, website kyky.org was shut down without warning by the government, which informed the website that it did not consider certain comments on the WWII celebrations to be appropriate. The website agreed to take down the comments, and it has since been unblocked.

In April 2015, President Lukashenka signed a decree which demands that all unemployed persons pay a tax - "the social parasitism law". There are exemptions, including those with disabilities, students, those under 18 and over retirement age, and people with more than three children. According to the authorities, the law is designed to stimulate the economy by encouraging people back to work, but also targets people and organisations who receive undeclared foreign income, including human rights organisations.

In the first half of 2015, there were over 30 incidents where journalists were detained, fined or arrested. Most involved journalists working with foreign media outlets without permission. Other journalists have had material confiscated from them whilst crossing the border. This signals continued harassment of independent journalists, which appears to be worsening in the run-up to the presidential elections on 11 October 2015.

In Freedom House's 2015 report, Belarus continues to score just one point above the lowest score for freedom and is deemed to be "not free". The latest Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders keeps Belarus at 157th place out of 180.

On 25 March 2015, an estimated 1,000 people marched in Minsk to mark "Freedom Day", celebrating the establishment of Belarus as an independent country in 1918. This is a way for opposition parties to express their opposition to the government. Fewer people attended this year than in 2014. There were five arrests during the march, but currently no one has been charged with an offence.

President Lukashenka declared an amnesty in the first half of 2015. Around 8,000 prisoners may eventually benefit from the amnesty but, to date, only 163 prisoners have been released early. The President also relaxed rules for forming trade unions following criticism of labour legislation in Belarus at the 2015 International Labour Organisation conference.