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Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**Situation of human rights in Belarus****Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus* *****Summary*

In the present report, submitted to the Human Rights Council pursuant to resolution 58/19, the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus has consolidated its findings on the human rights violations and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Belarusian authorities since 1 May 2020.

The Group of Independent Experts deepened its investigations into the patterns of violations committed by the State authorities to repress dissent both in Belarus and abroad. It finds that the Belarusian authorities continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain individuals for their actual or perceived opposition to the Government and then to subject them to inhuman conditions of detention, ill-treatment and torture. The Group has also documented a pattern of transnational repression targeting Belarusians living in exile, notes a pervasive culture of impunity and makes recommendations to Belarus and the international community to ensure respect for, and the protection and fulfilment of, the fundamental human rights of the Belarusian people.

* Agreement was reached to publish the present document after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate and scope of the report

1. The Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus submits the present report pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 58/19. The report should be read in conjunction with its previous reports¹ and those of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,² as well as with the findings of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus.

2. The Group of Independent Experts is composed of three independent experts: Karinna Moskalkenko, Chair (Russian Federation); Susan Bazilli (Canada); and Monika Stanisława Płatek (Poland). It is supported by a secretariat whose capacity has been reduced by about 50 per cent due to the liquidity crisis in relation to the budget of the United Nations.

3. Established on 4 April 2024 in Human Rights Council resolution 55/27, the Group is mandated to investigate the facts, circumstances and root causes of all alleged human rights violations and abuses committed in Belarus since 1 May 2020, to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of such violations and abuses and identify those responsible, to make recommendations, in particular on accountability measures, and to engage with all relevant stakeholders, with a view to exchanging information and providing support for national, regional and international efforts to promote accountability and engage with the Belarusian authorities to assist them in fulfilling their international human rights obligations.

4. The present report is focused on the findings of the Group of Independent Experts made on the basis of testimonies and materials collected since 1 January 2025.

B. Lack of cooperation by the Government

5. On 27 May 2025, the Group of Independent Experts sent a note verbale to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva renewing its request to visit Belarus and meet with the authorities (see annex I). On 1 December, the Group requested information on the steps taken to prevent and investigate deaths in custody (see annex II). On 19 January 2026, it shared a draft of the present report. All communications remain unanswered as at the time of reporting.

6. The failure to cooperate by the Belarusian authorities hindered, at least in part, the fulfilment of the mandate of the Group of Independent Experts, which could not meet with victims and witnesses based in Belarus, visit places of detention or engage with officials.

C. Cooperation with other mechanisms

7. During the reporting period, the Group of Independent Experts held consultations on the human rights situation in Belarus and on accountability with a number of stakeholders, including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, representatives of the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, the International Labour Organization, the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, the Human Rights House Foundation and other Belarusian and international organizations.

8. Among the various meetings attended by the Group of Independent Experts, on 5 and 6 May 2025, it participated in a meeting on civic space organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna. On 10 October, the experts met with representatives of Belarusian civil society organizations in exile and with the Ministry of

¹ [A/HRC/58/68](#); and conference room paper of the Group of Experts, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-60-crp-1-english-version.pdf>.

² [A/HRC/49/71](#), [A/HRC/52/68](#) and [A/HRC/55/61](#).

Foreign Affairs of Poland, in Warsaw, and participated in a side event on transnational repression in Belarus organized by OSCE.

D. Methodology

9. The investigations were carried out in accordance with the principle of “do no harm”, including with respect to confidentiality safeguards and the protection of victims, witnesses and other individuals affected by its work.

10. The Group of Independent Experts applied the “reasonable grounds to believe” standard of proof commonly used by international human rights investigative bodies. It included factual findings only when an impartial and ordinary prudent observer would have reasonable grounds to conclude that the facts took place as described. Every piece of information has been corroborated by obtaining consistent information by at least two other independent, reliable and valid sources.

11. All information collected by the Group of Independent Experts is stored, protected and maintained safely and securely, in accordance with international practice standards in this area.³

12. Despite its limited resources and the lack of access to Belarus, the Group of Independent Experts carried out five investigative missions in selected countries to interview victims, witnesses, representatives of human rights organizations, journalists, former members of the security forces and other Belarusians in exile.

13. The Group of Independent Experts based its findings on 181 interviews, of which 99 were held virtually and 82 in person (with 69 women and 112 men). It also drew on approximately 2,000 pieces of information, including videos, photographs, digital material, official statements by public officials, medical records and court documents. The Group also reviewed 35 written submissions by individuals, civil society organizations and members of academia.

14. In line with its mandate to collect and preserve information in a manner to maximize the possibility of its admissibility in legal proceedings, during the reporting period, the Group of Independent Experts provided information to international and national accountability mechanisms.

15. The Group of Independent Experts made legal determinations on the basis of international human rights law and customary international criminal law as applicable in Belarus.⁴

II. Continuing patterns of violations

16. The interviews and materials collected during the reporting period confirm the Group’s previous findings: since May 2020, the Belarusian authorities have engaged in a widespread campaign of the arbitrary arrest and detention of Belarusians who oppose the Government or who are perceived as opposing it. The authorities, through their security apparatus, have systematically crushed the fundamental human rights of the Belarusian people, including the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly, association and a fair trial. Belarusians have been subjected to inhuman conditions of detention, ill-treatment and torture. The rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons have also been trampled upon. Furthermore, the Group of Independent

³ For more details on the standard of proof, the preservation of collected information, and the mandate, legal framework and cooperation with other mechanisms, see the terms of reference of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, available from www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/gie-belarus/index. See also “Commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions on international human rights and humanitarian law: guidance and practice”, New York and Geneva, 2015.

⁴ [A/HRC/49/71](#), sect. III.

Experts is concerned by the death in custody of eight detainees, all of whom are believed to have been arrested and detained arbitrarily in connection with the 2020 presidential elections.

A. Arbitrary arrests, detentions and right to a fair trial

17. Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Belarus ratified in 1973, prohibits arbitrary arrest or detention and requires that deprivation of liberty be conducted on grounds and in accordance with procedures prescribed by law. As emphasized by the Human Rights Committee, deprivation of liberty must not be arbitrary and must be carried out with respect for the rule of law.⁵ According to the Committee, the arrest or detention of an individual as punishment for the legitimate exercise of the rights guaranteed under the Covenant, including freedom of opinion and expression, is arbitrary.⁶ The Committee has also stressed that persons who are deprived of liberty are to be informed, at the time of any deprivation of liberty, of the reasons for it.⁷

18. The Group of Independent Experts finds that Belarus has continued to systematically breach article 9 of the Covenant. Throughout the reporting period, individuals were subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, opinion, peaceful assembly and association, in connection with the 2020 presidential elections, the political situation in Belarus and the conflict in Ukraine. In 2025, at least 1,254 people (899 men and 355 women) were reportedly convicted in court on politically motivated charges.⁸

19. The Group of Independent Experts continued to observe a misuse of national security and extremism-related legislation to silence any dissent and target opposition figures, human rights defenders, members of civil society organizations, journalists, lawyers, trade unionists and citizens expressing opinions considered to be hostile to the authorities. Individuals perceived as political opponents continued to be arrested and charged under article 342 (organization and preparation of actions that grossly violate public order or active participation in them), article 369 (insulting a government official), article 361-1 (financing extremist activity) and 361-4 (promoting extremist activity) of the Criminal Code of Belarus, among others, for exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of expression, opinion, peaceful assembly and association. While scores of individuals were not informed of the reasons for their arrests, many Belarusians continued to be arrested for comments that they made on social media (for reading, sharing or liking information labelled “extremist”) or for participating in events believed to be hostile to the Government.

20. One interviewee was arrested in 2024 after attempting to lay flowers at the Embassy of the Russian Federation to Belarus, in Minsk, on the day of Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny’s death. The interviewee was sentenced to 30 days’ administrative detention by the Central District Court of Minsk and held in a temporary detention centre under extremely harsh conditions in an overcrowded cell infested with lice and bedbugs. During the final three days of the sentence, he was re-arrested on criminal charges and sentenced to six years’ imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 roubles under article 342 of the Criminal Code. He was unexpectedly released in September 2025 and transferred to Lithuania (see sect. III.A below).

21. Another interviewee described being violently arrested for his activity on social media while he was doing his military service in 2022. Eight officers of the Special Purpose Police Detachment and the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, fully armed with machine guns, arrived at the location of his military unit to carry out the arrest. As he was returning from the canteen, they forced him to the ground. During the arrest, one police officer stepped on his left hand, breaking three fingers. Referring to his online posts, the first question that the interviewee was asked was:

⁵ Human Rights Committee, general recommendation No. 35 (2014) on liberty and security of person, para. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 24.

⁸ Human Rights Center “Viasna”, “Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025”, 13 January 2026.

“Well, glory to Ukraine?” He then spent years in arbitrary detention, until 2025, following a trial that did not respect due process.

22. With a judiciary in the hands of the executive⁹ and the systematic harassment of the independent legal profession,¹⁰ the rights of prisoners held on politically motivated grounds to have a legal counsel of their own choice and a genuine defence continued to be severely impeded.

23. Trials against Belarusian individuals who are opposed to, or perceived as being opposed to, the Government have been marred with systematic and grave violations of due process and fair trial rights. All the individuals interviewed in 2025 reported limited or no access to defence lawyers at the time of their arrest, during preliminary investigations and during their trial; many interviewees reported being forced to self-incriminate, including on camera, and some in the presence of their State-appointed lawyers.

24. The free exercise of the legal profession continued to be under severe threat in Belarus, with the authorities pressuring independent lawyers and barring access to the profession. Investigations by the Group of Independent Experts have shown that retaliatory prosecution, convictions, disbarment and the revocation of the licences of lawyers, particularly those representing prominent opposition figures and anti-Government activists, continue to date, affecting an ever diminishing number of legal professionals in Belarus.

B. Inhuman conditions of detention

25. Belarus is bound by article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provides that all persons deprived of their liberty are to be treated humanely and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) also establish the State’s responsibility to treat all prisoners with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings, without any discrimination, including on the grounds of political or other opinion, to provide prisoners with accommodation which meets all requirements of health and to provide prisoners with appropriate healthcare services. Prisoners are to be allowed, under necessary supervision, to communicate with their family and friends at regular intervals, including by receiving visits. In addition, the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners¹¹ provide that all prisoners are to be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings and are to have access to health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation.

26. The Group of Independent Experts finds that Belarus has continued to systematically violate its international obligations regarding the treatment of detainees held in penal colonies, prisons, pretrial detention facilities run by the Directorate for Corrections and temporary detention centres run by the Department of Execution and Supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs throughout the country. Most of the interviewees released in 2025 described being held in inhuman conditions, marked by extreme cold, rat-infested cells, overcrowding and the denial of access to medical care, legal counsel and contact with their families, including visits, correspondence and telephone calls.

27. One interviewee, a father of six, reported being arrested in front of his family in Minsk in 2021 for his alleged participation in the 2020 protests. He was released in January 2025 after having been kept in arbitrary detention in four different facilities across Belarus for more than four years. He described his conditions of detention as “torture by cold” and detailed how sleeping for years on the freezing concrete floor of his two by two metres cells in penal colonies No. 15 and No. 17 has had a severe and lasting impact on his physical and mental health. He explained that the cells in those colonies were under constant video surveillance and that, as the cold persisted, he suffered from prolonged sleep deprivation and from a hypertensive crisis. He repeatedly requested medical assistance, to no avail. As his condition worsened, he was visited by a doctor who arrived only after several days and

⁹ A/HRC/58/68, paras. 11 and 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., para. 29.

¹¹ General Assembly resolution 45/111, annex.

administered minimal medical treatment. Throughout that period, the interviewee's family was not informed of his whereabouts or of his health conditions. This testimony is just one of several accounts that the Group of Independent Experts received in 2025 and preserved in its information repository, all containing descriptions of inhuman conditions of detention, which in some cases may amount to torture.

28. Detainees held on politically motivated charges continued to be systematically subjected to discriminatory practices amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment in detention facilities across Belarus. One interviewee, released at the end of 2024 after having been arbitrarily arrested in 2022, described the discriminatory conditions of his detention as a political prisoner in a pretrial detention facility and in a penal colony. He confirmed the previous findings of the Group of Independent Experts and explained that political prisoners were identifiable by yellow tags sewn onto their clothing and were routinely subjected to pressure and placed in punitive isolation cells on fabricated disciplinary grounds. Many individuals were designated as repeat offenders after having received three disciplinary sanctions. Political prisoners were subjected to a range of systematic restrictions, including being prevented from attending religious services and being denied access to the prison library. They were prohibited from using exercise facilities, including the stadium and gym, and excluded from participating in prison competitions. In addition to not being eligible for long-term family visits, their ability to receive parcels and correspondence was limited to close relatives only, and they were systematically denied eligibility for early release on parole.

29. Some prisoners were subjected to degrading treatment. In one documented instance, the interviewee and other political detainees were lined up against the wall with their legs spread wide and their hands touching the wall. The guards kicked their feet to compel them to maintain the position on a slippery floor. Another interviewee, held in a temporary detention centre in Minsk in 2024, reported having been threatened by a guard to be sent to a cell with political detainees who were "packed like sardines".

30. The Group of Independent Experts documented several cases in which individuals held on political grounds, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons, were placed in a low social status category of detainees, which entailed even harsher detention conditions. According to an informal hierarchy enforced in Belarusian prisons, such detainees belong to the lowest "caste", usually reserved for people convicted for sexual crimes. They are forced to clean toilets and carry out other menial tasks, receive a lower remuneration for their work and are isolated from other detainees. Furthermore, political detainees interviewed by the Group who were labelled as low social status described being placed in punitive isolation cells. Placement in the low social status category constituted a particularly humiliating and distressing experience for detainees.

31. The Group of Independent Experts also verified the case of an opposition leader who was held in incommunicado detention from February 2023 until his forced expulsion from the country in June 2025. During his more than two years of incommunicado detention, he was prevented from receiving any visits (not even from doctors or priests), and he stopped receiving parcels and letters.

32. Criminal and security laws continued to be misused in 2025 to harass political prisoners already in detention. Specifically, article 411 of the Criminal Code, which establishes criminal liability for convicted persons for "malicious disobedience to the lawful demands of the administration", is applied to hold political prisoners behind bars at the end of their prison sentence. In practice, this provision allows for certain disciplinary infractions committed within penal institutions to be used for the imposition of an additional custodial sentence, at the discretion of a prison official and on fabricated charges. This article and, consequently, the extension of the term of imprisonment have been repeatedly used against political prisoners.

33. The application of article 411 of the Criminal Code has resulted in serious ambiguity regarding the duration of imprisonment, as prison administrations may initiate new criminal proceedings prior to the completion of an existing sentence, often only weeks or months before an individual's scheduled release. This climate of uncertainty has caused severe psychological pain to the persons subjected to it.

C. Torture and ill-treatment

34. Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are prohibited under article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 7 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and articles 1, 2 and 16 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the latter of which was ratified by Belarus in 1987.

35. The post-2020 election period in Belarus was marked by a pervasive system of torture and ill-treatment perpetrated by security forces, primarily aimed at punishing demonstrators and instilling fear.¹²

36. Belarusians interviewed by the Group of Independent Experts in 2025 consistently reported that, following the election of 9 August 2020, law enforcement and security force personnel frequently resorted to severe beatings and excessive physical force against protesters. Accounts provided by prisoners detained on politically motivated grounds described recurring patterns of conduct involving multiple cases of torture that occurred in the context of arrests, transfers and interrogations in the margins of the 2020 election. Interviewees described the use of punches and kicks, beatings with batons or other objects and the application of electroshock devices to multiple parts of the body while detainees were restrained. In a limited number of cases, the application of water prior to the use of electroshock devices was reported. The Group also received allegations of sexual violence and threats thereof. Most interviewees reported sustaining visible bruising and burn injuries, some of which remained apparent weeks after the alleged incidents. According to the information available to the Group, those injuries were usually not recorded by law enforcement officials, judicial authorities or medical personnel within detention facilities.

37. The Group of Independent Experts found that officers of the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption and of the Committee for State Security, among other security structures, have been responsible for most of the acts of torture and ill-treatment committed in the aftermath of the 2020 election, with the purpose of intimidating detainees, extracting forced confessions and punishing political opponents.

D. Death in custody

38. The Group of Independent Experts collected testimonies and materials relating to deaths in detention that have occurred in Belarus since 1 May 2020, and it has reasonable grounds to believe that at least eight of those deaths resulted from a failure to protect life in detention and may amount to violations of the right to life. The eight individuals who died in the custody of the State are believed to have been arrested and detained arbitrarily for exercising their fundamental human rights to freedom of opinion and expression, in connection with the 2020 presidential election. Some of the deceased had serious pre-existing mental and physical health conditions that were known to the authorities. The Group is gravely concerned that some of those deaths could have been prevented and that they resulted from inhuman detention conditions and inadequate medical care.

39. The Group of Independent Experts transmitted two official communications to the Belarusian authorities, on 29 November 2024 and on 1 December 2025, on the persons who had died in the custody of the Belarusian authorities since 1 May 2020, and it requested information on the steps taken to prevent all instances of death in custody, on the measures taken to investigate the causes of death and on the outcome of the investigation of any person who had died in the custody of the State since 1 May 2020. In the communications, the Group also reminded the Government that, when an individual died while in State custody, there was a presumption of State responsibility. The Group regrets that it has not received a response from the Belarusian authorities to date. The Group finds that Belarus is in breach of its obligations under article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 6 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee everyone's right to life, personal security and not to be arbitrarily deprived of life.

¹² [A/HRC/58/68](#), sect. IV.B.

E. Interference with the right of association

40. The Group of Independent Experts finds that the Belarusian authorities have continued violating the right to freedom of association, which is protected by article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

41. The Group of Independent Experts documented the case of a gender equality and women's rights training programme for young Belarusian women, known as the Women Leadership School, which was added to the list of extremist organizations in October 2024, along with its organizers. The programme organized online classes for participants in Belarus. Between September and November 2024, members of the Committee for State Security and of the District Police Departments arrested some of its participants. Some of them were interrogated under considerable pressure about their participation in the programme and many were charged with petty hooliganism (article 19.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences) and detained for up to 30 days. Several participants subsequently fled Belarus fearing arrest and reprisals against their families.

42. The Group of Independent Experts also interviewed members of the Imaguru Startup Hub, a company that connects entrepreneurs, investors and business professionals. During the time of the 2020 elections, the company, which was based in Minsk, hosted events and initiatives organized by civil society representatives, human rights defenders and the opposition. Following the waves of arbitrary arrests and detentions, many of its members fled Belarus. In July 2023, the former director of the company was arrested and convicted, and, in August 2023, the company was added to the list of extremist organizations in Belarus and consequently liquidated. The founders who fled Belarus and who were interviewed by the Group of Independent Experts were tried in absentia and sentenced to 11 and 12 years' detention, respectively, in December 2024. Moreover, their property was seized, and their bank accounts were frozen.

43. The repression of civil society organizations continued unabated in 2025: from 1 January to 31 October 2025, the Belarusian authorities reportedly revoked the registration of at least 32 civil society organizations.¹³ It is estimated that, from the beginning of 2021 to the end of December 2025, at least 1,220 civil society organizations were liquidated.¹⁴

44. Moreover, in 2025, the courts reportedly added 2,107 information materials, including websites, social media accounts and messaging channels, to the list of "extremist" materials. According to Human Rights Center "Viasna", as at 5 December 2025, 8,172 materials have been labelled "extremist" in Belarus, a quarter of which were added in 2025.¹⁵

F. Repression of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex communities

45. During the reporting period, the Group of Independent Experts continued documenting a pattern of discrimination against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex communities.

46. Witnesses recounted being subjected to derogatory and sexually abusive comments about their sexual orientation and practices by penitentiary guards and members of the Committee for State Security. Furthermore, some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons were placed in the low social status category of detainees (see para. 30 above).

47. The Group of Independent Experts documented the case of a gay man who was arrested by the police in August 2021 for organizing an unauthorized protest and was later

¹³ Lawtrend, "Monitoring NGOs in Belarus that are undergoing forced liquidation and have decided to self-liquidate", accessed on 8 January 2026 (in Russian).

¹⁴ Lawtrend, "Monitoring the situation with freedom of association and the status of civil society organisations in the Republic of Belarus, December 2025", accessed on 8 January 2026 (in Russian).

¹⁵ Human Rights Center "Viasna", "2107 new 'extremist materials': the results of 2025 in Belarus", 5 January 2026.

convicted for insulting the President and a State symbol. In prison, he was subjected to humiliation and to inhuman and discriminatory conditions of detention. The Head of the Operative Unit of penal colony No. 2 in Bobruysk placed him in the low social status category of detainees. The victim was also placed on a registry of inmates prone to extremism. Penitentiary officers subjected him to derogatory remarks and members of the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption pressured him to become an informant.

48. Furthermore, while in detention, an intimate sex video of the victim was disseminated, without his consent, on a Telegram channel allegedly operated by law enforcement. He was released in June 2024 after serving his full sentence.

49. The victim's arrest and the mistreatment and humiliation that he suffered while in detention had a heavy toll on him. He experienced several mental health crises, and his health deteriorated. He did not receive adequate medical treatment while in prison.

50. Moreover, the victim's husband, who had returned to Belarus from Poland to support him, was also arrested at his home in September 2024 by officers of the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption who beat him and forced him to confess that he belonged to extremist groups. During his detention, officers from the Directorate forced him to sign a cooperation agreement. The interviewee was discharged from custody after spending 10 days in a temporary detention centre.

51. After their release from prison, they both fled Belarus.

52. The Group of Independent Experts notes that, on 3 October 2025, the House of Representatives adopted, on its first reading, a draft law on amendments to codes on issues of administrative liability, which introduced administrative liability for "propaganda of homosexuality, sex change, childlessness and paedophilia". The bill proposes the inclusion in the Code of Administrative Offences of a provision prohibiting the "distribution, in any form, of information aimed at shaping citizens' perceptions about the attractiveness of homosexual relations, sex change [and] childlessness or about the recognition of paedophilia as permissible".

53. The Group of Independent Experts is concerned that the draft law, if adopted by the parliament, may not be in line with the principles of equality and non-discrimination or with the right to freedom of expression, protected by articles 26 and 19 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights respectively.

III. Newly verified patterns of violations

54. Testimonies and materials collected during the reporting period allowed the Group of Independent Experts to document patterns of human rights violations that it had not previously fully verified.

A. Forced exile

55. Following negotiations with representatives of the United States of America, the Belarusian authorities released from prison and then expelled from the country a total of 192 individuals in 2025, of whom at least 162 had been detained on politically motivated grounds. The releases and expulsions were carried out on 12 February, 21 June, 11 September and 13 December. Among those released, 33 were foreign nationals or had dual citizenship and 45 were women. Several high-profile prisoners held on politically motivated grounds, human rights activists and journalists, including Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Maryia Kalesnikava, Ales Bialiatski, Viktor Babaryka, Maksim Znak and Ihar Losik, were among the released. The Group of Independent Experts interviewed 28 individuals from the first three releases and expulsions.

56. The first three releases and expulsions were carried out by members of the Committee for State Security in an atmosphere of secrecy and psychological tension. The detainees did not receive any prior notice or explanation. Most of them were abruptly removed from

detention facilities by Committee officers wearing balaclavas, made to board on minivans, often handcuffed and with bags over their heads, and taken to a wooded area at the border with Lithuania. From there they were handed over to diplomats of the United States and brought to Lithuania. One witness thought, during his transportation, that he was on a death convoy.

57. Prior to their release, some detainees were brought to a pretrial detention centre (Amerikanka) of the Committee for State Security, in Minsk, where they spent a night.

58. Some detainees were stripped of their passports before their release.

59. Most of the released persons were expelled from Belarus against their will. They did not request a pardon, nor did they sign statements consenting to being transferred to Lithuania.

60. Moreover, they did not receive any document certifying their release and are thus uncertain about their status in Belarus and particularly whether they would still have to finish serving their sentence if they were to return. An interviewee told the Group of Independent Experts that he believed that, in the eyes of the Belarusian authorities, he remained a criminal and that he feared that, if he were to return to Belarus, he could be accused of being a fugitive.¹⁶

61. While it welcomes the releases of detainees, most of whom were detained on politically motivated charges, the Group of Independent Experts observes that the forcible expulsion of Belarusian citizens to a third country and the arbitrary confiscation of their identity documents, as well as the arbitrary deportation of foreign nationals, is in violation of human rights standards.¹⁷ The Group notes that more than 1,131 persons (167 women and 964 men) reportedly remain unlawfully or arbitrarily detained in Belarus for politically motivated reasons.¹⁸

62. The Group of Independent Experts is also concerned about the health conditions of opposition leader Mikalai Statkevich. On 11 September, Mr. Statkevich escaped from the bus that was transporting him to the border with Lithuania to be released alongside 51 other detainees. Mr. Statkevich, who is 69 and reportedly in ill health, was held in incommunicado detention from February or March 2023 to September 2025.¹⁹ After his escape, the Belarusian authorities arrested him, and he is currently detained in a penal colony (reportedly in colony No. 13 in Glubokoye).

B. Forced pardons

63. The Group of Independent Experts documented several cases in which penitentiary officers, members of the Special Purpose Police Detachment or representatives of the Office of the Prosecutor General pressured detainees on politically motivated grounds into requesting pardons.

64. In some cases, detainees who refused to sign a pardon request were subjected to severe psychological violence which may amount to torture. Many were transferred to punitive isolation cells. A witness recounted being transferred between pretrial detention facilities, each transfer involving humiliating searches and poor detention conditions. Another interviewee stated that she was threatened that she would not be able to talk anymore to her family and would receive a long prison sentence.

¹⁶ The Group also documented two cases in which women pensioners had stopped receiving their pension payments after their release in June 2025.

¹⁷ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, arts. 9 and 13; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, arts. 12 (1) and (4) and 13; and Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 27 (1999) on freedom of movement, para. 21. See also Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “Belarus: UN experts denounce expulsion of citizens, warn about risk of statelessness”, 8 December 2025.

¹⁸ As at 9 January, 1,125 persons in Belarus are considered as political prisoners, according to Human Rights Center “Viasna”, “Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025”.

¹⁹ [A/HRC/55/61](#), para. 35; and [A/HRC/58/68](#), para. 56.

C. Transnational repression

65. The Belarusian authorities have orchestrated a campaign designed to repress dissent not only in Belarus, but also among Belarusians who have been forced to flee the country for this very reason.

66. Transnational repression consists of acts conducted by a State to deter, silence or punish dissent, criticism or human rights advocacy towards it, expressed from outside its territory.²⁰ It can take various forms. The Group of Independent Experts documented public threats, the initiation of criminal proceedings, trials conducted in absentia, the confiscation of property and the freezing of assets, inclusion on the lists of extremists, the persecution of journalists, impediments to mobility and the harassment of the family members of dissenters.

1. Public threats

67. In 2025, the President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, in his public statements and interviews with media, explicitly threatened Belarusians living in exile.

68. For example, in a press conference held on 26 January 2025, prior to the announcement of 2025 presidential election results, the President stated that he had instructed intelligence officers to identify Belarusians participating in peaceful protests abroad and hinted that their relatives might be targeted as a consequence:

I told my intelligence officers ... take photos of everything and say that we will identify them. And so, out of fear, they will rally there against their own country, while we have complete files of them and all their photos ... And we hinted to them that their relatives, parents, family and loved ones live here. You'll just be setting your own people up, and we'll deal with you. That's how afraid they are. So, what kind of protest? They reacted to that. If you're stupid, go ahead. We won't go. We don't want our relatives to be exposed in Belarus, and they want themselves one day to return to the country.²¹

69. Furthermore, during an interview on 21 January, the President stated that those who threw "mud at us, having escaped abroad", should submit a request to the Return Commission, which was "composed of people who have seen what you did in 2020", adding that "we must be able to forgive people, but only those who can be forgiven".²²

70. In another instance, a journalist working for the pro-government television channel All-National Television, referring to a speech made by the President on 26 January, stated that:

Fugitives will have three options. The first is to continue harming your homeland, but this will cost you much in terms of the confiscation of real estate and other property, even if it has been transferred or gifted to someone else. The second option is to forget about Belarus, stop causing trouble and put all your energy into becoming Poles, Lithuanians, Germans or Americans ... You leave us alone, and we will leave you alone. And the third one is that if you, Belarusians, are unhappy abroad and have changed your minds, realized your mistakes or repented, come back. The regime, as you say, is indeed cruel, but only to enemies of the homeland, because the homeland cannot treat its enemies any other way.²³

2. Criminal proceedings

71. On 27 January 2025, the Investigative Committee announced the opening of criminal investigations against 365 Belarusian individuals who, on 26 January, had participated in

²⁰ OHCHR, "Transnational repression", Civic Space Brief, 18 June 2025.

²¹ News.by "2025 Elections: Alexander Lukashenko Answers Journalists' Questions! Live Broadcast", available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=fldZ4_s1EB8 (in Russian).

²² President of Belarus, "Visit to the Minsk Automobile Plant", 21 January 2025, available at <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/posesenie-minskogo-avtozavoda> (in Russian).

²³ ONT news, "How fugitives tried to discredit the elections in Belarus, but ended up discrediting themselves", 27 January 2025, available at <https://t.me/ontnews/170930> (in Russian).

peaceful demonstrations in various European cities to protest against the legitimacy of the presidential elections held in Belarus on the same day.²⁴

72. The Committee later also opened criminal investigations against 207 individuals who had participated in the 2025 Freedom Day celebrations on 25 March in various European cities.²⁵

73. The Group of Independent Experts also documented a number of cases in which judicial authorities initiated criminal proceedings in 2025 against Belarusians in exile for having given interviews to media outlets, some of whom were declared extremists, or for having posted online photos of a meeting with the opposition leaders in exile.

3. Trials in absentia

74. The Group of Independent Experts continued documenting several cases of exiled Belarusians who were tried in absentia in 2024 on politically motivated charges. The Group notes that, although the number of criminal investigations opened in 2025 remained high, the number of trials in absentia decreased compared with the previous year. Reportedly, at least 30 people were convicted in 2025,²⁶ compared with 87 in 2024.²⁷

75. The interviewees stated that they were not officially notified by the court about the start of the trial and that they did not receive any documents during the proceedings. One witness recounted having learned about the trial through friends in Belarus who monitored the website of the Investigative Committee. Requests to attend the trial online were rejected, and the State-appointed attorney never contacted them. Moreover, most of the interviewees did not receive a copy of the judgment.

76. All of the interviewees received harsh prison sentences.

77. The Group of Independent Experts finds that the manner in which such trials are conducted falls far short of international standards. Indeed, article 14 (3) (a) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires that, notwithstanding the absence of the accused, all due steps have been taken to inform accused persons of the charges and to notify them of the proceedings.²⁸ Furthermore, trials in absentia are permissible only if the necessary steps are taken to summon accused persons in a timely manner and to inform them beforehand about the date and place of their trial and to request their attendance.²⁹

4. Confiscation of property and freezing of assets

78. Several interviewees who fled Belarus recounted that their properties had been sealed, evaluated or seized and that their bank accounts had been frozen during criminal investigations. As a result, some of them stopped receiving their pensions or other social allowances.

5. Inclusion on the list of extremist organizations and lists of “extremists” and “terrorists”

79. The Belarusian authorities also added cultural associations and civil society organizations and their members in exile to the list of extremist organizations.

²⁴ Investigative Committee of Belarus, “365 participants in protests abroad have been identified. The information has been added to the criminal case file”, 27 January 2025, available at <https://t.me/skgovby/12513> (in Russian).

²⁵ Investigative Committee of Belarus, “Another 207 participants in street protests abroad have been identified. Searches and seizures of property have begun”, 5 August 2025, available at <https://t.me/skgovby/13629>.

²⁶ Human Rights Center “Viasna”, “Human rights situation in Belarus in 2025”; and Human Rights Center “Viasna”, “At least 1,254 people convicted in 2025: the results of criminal prosecution”, 29 December 2025.

²⁷ A/HRC/58/68, para. 67.

²⁸ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 32 (2007) on the right to equality before courts and tribunals and to a fair trial, para. 31.

²⁹ Ibid., para. 36.

80. In December 2024, the Belarusian authorities added Volnya Kupalautsy, a theatre composed of around 60 exiled Belarusian artists established in 2022 in Poland, and many of its members to the list of extremist organizations in Belarus.

81. Moreover, in August 2025, the authorities declared the Belarusian Association of Human Rights Lawyers as an “extremist formation” and its members as individuals “involved in extremist activities”, exposing them to a risk of criminal prosecution. The association was established in 2023 by disbarred Belarusian attorneys in exile to offer legal counselling on the risks of staying in Belarus and trials conducted in absentia and to provide assistance with submitting complaints to international human rights bodies and mechanisms.³⁰

6. Persecution of journalists in exile

82. Journalists continued to be subject to arbitrary arrest and detention in Belarus, but they are also being targeted abroad.

83. The Group of Independent Experts verified several cases of exiled journalists who, after fleeing Belarus for fear of being arrested, were subject to criminal investigations because of their work abroad. In many cases, members of the Committee for State Security or of the police interrogated their families in Belarus – often elderly parents – and searched and sealed their properties. The authorities also froze their bank accounts and added the media outlets for which they worked to the list of extremist organizations.

84. A journalist, who was one of the founders of Belsat, an independent television channel, recounted that Belsat correspondents were among the first Belarusian journalists to be arrested during the 2020 mass protests and had been sentenced to imprisonment for performing their job. Belsat was declared an extremist organization in 2021, and many of its employees were arrested or fled the country due to the risk of arrest and detention. In October 2024, the journalist learned that his grandparents’ house had been sequestered, pursuant to a decision of the Investigative Committee.

85. In March 2025, the interviewee was informed that his parents’ house, in Pinsk, had also been sequestered and sealed by the Committee for State Security. The journalist has never been informed about a criminal investigation initiated against him in Belarus.

7. Impediments to mobility

86. The Group of Independent Experts continued documenting the detrimental impact of Presidential Decree No. 278 of 4 September 2023,³¹ which discontinued the issuance and renewal of passports and other vital records by Belarusian diplomatic missions. Interviewees, who could not return to Belarus to renew their passports because they feared being arrested, recounted that they had had difficulties obtaining residence permits and international protection in their host countries. The decree, which reportedly affected an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 Belarusians living in exile,³² could in the long term result in the loss of evidence of citizenship and potentially in statelessness.³³

8. Harassment of relatives

87. Relatives of Belarusians who fled persecution and live in exile faced harassment and intimidation by security forces.

88. Members of the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption and of other police departments under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as members of the Committee for State Security, regularly searched the houses where family members of exiled individuals lived – often elderly parents and grandparents – questioning them about the whereabouts and activities of their relatives. The law enforcement officers conducting the

³⁰ OHCHR, “UN experts urge Belarus to stop interfering in the legal profession”, 17 November 2025.

³¹ See A/HRC/58/68, para. 68.

³² International Strategic Action Network for Security, “Transnational repression in Belarus: a brutal tool of the persecution of dissent by the Lukashenka regime”, September 2025, p. 43.

³³ A/HRC/56/65, para. 26.

searches were often aggressive. They called the exiled individuals extremists and traitors to their family members and insulted and threatened them.

89. Law enforcement officers often visited the relatives of exiled individuals multiple times and repeatedly called them to enquire about the exiled family members. They pressured them into convincing their family members to ask for pardons, to submit requests to the Commission of Returnees and to return to Belarus.

90. An interviewee recounted how a member of the Committee for State Security, while carrying out a search at his mother's house, had used her mobile telephone to call him, who had hung up after realizing that it was not his mother. The law enforcement officer subsequently sent him a text message stating that it was in his interest to talk to him.

91. An interviewee who had fled Belarus in 2021 following numerous arrests and detentions stated that the Special Purpose Police Detachment had arrested his nephew in November 2023. A screenshot of the video of his nephew's arrest was then sent to the interviewee's Telegram account with the messages "you know how to stop this" and "give you two days to think about it". The interviewee asked how he could stop it, to which he received the answer that he could apply to the Return Commission, return to Belarus and repent for his actions. The witness did not respond, and his nephew was released after two days without charges. Such visits were very distressing for the family members.

92. A witness recounted that his mother, who suffered from heart problems, had been hospitalized for three days after being visited by law enforcement officers.

93. In one case, the mother-in-law of an exiled individual was dismissed from work in May 2025. The director of the school at which she worked reported that she had received a request from the Department of Education of the Minsk City Executive Committee to dismiss her.

D. Interference with the right to family life and the best interests of the child

94. The Group of Independent Experts verified cases in which authorities arrested and detained, on politically motivated grounds, both parents of children, as well as a foster parent who was the sole custodian of a child. The arrests were violent, and law enforcement officers often verbally abused the parents in front of their children.

95. Following the arrests, parents were taken away without being given the opportunity to explain the situation to their children.

96. An interviewee recounted how, in January 2021, masked men of the Special Purpose Police Detachment had broken down her apartment door, pushed her, shouted and verbally abused her, handcuffed her in front of her crying children and then taken her away.

97. The children were then often entrusted, under duress, to the care of their grandparents.

98. The Group of Independent Experts documented the case of a mother of two children who had been arrested and sentenced in 2020 to five years' detention and whose husband had also been detained. Following her arrest, her parents took custody of their grandchildren. The children's grandmother then decided to flee Belarus with her grandchildren, because she feared that the authorities would transfer them to an orphanage, since both parents were detained on criminal charges.

99. The Group of Independent Experts documented that, in some cases, detained parents were denied both in-person visits and telephone contact with their children.

100. A mother of three children, who had been detained in penal colony No. 4 in Gomel from 2022 to 2025 on politically motivated grounds, stated that she had been permitted to see them only twice in four years. Once a month, she was allowed to have video calls with them. However, from 2024, the prison administration deprived her of those calls.

101. The Group of Independent Experts also verified the case of the foster mother of a child with a disability who was arrested on politically motivated grounds in May 2025 in Minsk

by officers of the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption. The officers searched their apartment and verbally abused her in front of her child. One officer told her “I want to tear you apart like a toad” and mocked her living conditions. She was handcuffed in front of her son while he was trying to hold her hand. She was then taken away for interrogation as her son was screaming.

102. Her son, who required special educational support, was placed in a temporary children’s shelter at a pedagogical-social centre in Minsk. During his stay, the child, who is visually impaired, received inappropriate nutrition and support, did not have access to schooling and suffered from the absence of his mother. Upon her release from the Okrestina temporary detention centre where she was detained for 10 days, her mother fled to Lithuania with her son. After his stay in the children’s shelter, the child’s physical and emotional health deteriorated, and he regressed developmentally by about one year.

103. The violent arrests, detentions and subsequent separation, often for many years, from their parents took a heavy toll on children. They were often traumatized, and the relationships with their parents became strained. A witness told the Group of Independent Experts that “both as a child and as a parent, you can never replace that lost time”, adding that she faced “significant difficulties in reconnecting with the children, who suffer from the feeling of abandonment”.

104. International human rights law protects the right to family life and the best interests of the child.³⁴ The Committee on the Rights of the Child has noted that, in cases where the parents or other primary caregivers committed an offence, alternatives to detention should be made available and applied on a case-by-case basis, with full consideration of the likely impact of different sentences on the best interests of the affected child or children.³⁵ In this respect, the Group of Independent Experts considers that the Belarusian authorities did not factor in childcare responsibilities as a mitigating circumstance when deciding on detention.

E. Women’s rights violations in detention

105. Women who were arrested or detained on politically motivated charges were often subjected to unjustified strip-searches, sometimes in the presence of men.

106. They lacked or were denied access to healthcare specific to their needs. They were also deprived of basic hygienic items, including menstrual pads. The detention conditions, including the exposure to cold, had a detrimental impact on the health of female detainees, who contracted illnesses, including urological diseases.

107. The Group of Independent Experts notes that, pursuant to rules 5, 6 and 10 of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), detention facilities are to have facilities and materials required to meet women’s specific hygiene and healthcare needs.

108. The Group of Independent Experts also documented cases in which women were subjected to sexually explicit and inappropriate remarks by male guards, including abrasive comments on their motherhood. Two interviewees held on politically motivated charges recounted how prison guards threatened that they would remove custody of their children if they did not cooperate.

109. A woman who was arrested in October 2021 for her participation in a peaceful protest in Brest in 2020 recounted that, while she was held in a pretrial detention facility in Brest, investigators threatened that they would remove custody of her children if she refused to confess her guilt. In penal colony No. 4 in Gomel, where she was held between 2022 and 2025, prison guards repeatedly told her that her husband would divorce her and that she

³⁴ Articles 3 and 9 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Belarus in 1990; and articles 23 (1) and 24 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

³⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, para. 69.

would end up alone. Furthermore, she suffered from high blood pressure and gynaecological conditions, but she received no adequate treatment.

110. Another woman told the Group of Independent Experts that, while she was detained in a temporary detention centre in Rechitsa in October 2023, the Deputy Head of the Regional Department of the Execution of Punishment of the Ministry of Internal Affairs forced her to request a pardon, telling her that, if she refused, “for the next 5 to 10 years, your children will be without a mother, your husband will find a new woman. Write a pardon request and within 12 hours you will leave Belarus”. During her detention, she lost a significant amount of weight and contracted cystitis because she was denied sanitary pads and basic hygiene and because she was held in cold and humid cells.

IV. Crimes against humanity

111. Based on the interviews and materials collected during the reporting period, the Group of Independent Experts reiterates its previous findings. It finds that, since May 2020, some of the human rights violations, carried out as part of a widespread and systematic attack against a segment of the civilian population, and which were perpetrated by the Belarusian authorities who had knowledge of the attack and knew that their acts were part of it, amount to the crimes against humanity of persecution and imprisonment.³⁶

V. Accountability

112. Belarusians should be able to expect that their State will fulfil its obligation under international law to hold the individuals responsible for human rights violations to account. However, the State of Belarus demonstrated both an inability and an unwillingness to investigate any human rights violation within its jurisdiction. As the Group of Independent Experts has repeatedly reported, not only have there been no investigations or disciplinary proceedings since 1 May 2020, but officials who were allegedly implicated in gross human rights violations were later promoted to a higher rank or received a State award.³⁷ The Belarusian authorities confirmed that the investigative agencies had received approximately 5,000 complaints about unlawful conduct by internal affairs officials, members of the internal military forces and other law enforcement officials on the day of the 2020 presidential election and after the election campaign. In all such cases, they decided not to initiate criminal proceedings.³⁸ Through this apparent policy of shielding perpetrators of human rights violations from accountability, Belarus perpetuates a well-grounded system of impunity benefiting the inner circle of the Presidency and those loyal to it.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

113. The Group of Independent Experts finds that the Belarusian authorities have continued to systematically violate international human rights law. They arbitrarily arrest and detain individuals for their actual or perceived opposition to the Government. The conditions of detention are inhuman, and prisoners are tortured and subjected to ill-treatment. Detainees held on politically motivated charges and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons are discriminated against and subjected to harsher conditions of detention. The trials conducted do not respect basic fair trial guarantees. The repression of civil society organizations also continued

³⁶ [A/HRC/58/68](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-60-crp-1-english-version.pdf), paras. 69–82; and conference room paper of the Group of Experts, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-60-crp-1-english-version.pdf>, paras. 15–19.

³⁷ See conference room paper of the Group of Experts, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-60-crp-1-english-version.pdf>.

³⁸ [A/79/44](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ohchrbelarus/a-hrc-60-crp-1-english-version.pdf), para. 40.

unabated during the reporting period. Furthermore, the Group is concerned by the death in custody of eight individuals who were held on politically motivated charges.

114. The Belarusian authorities failed to consider the best interests of the child and the right to family life when deciding on detention. The Group of Independent Experts verified cases in which both parents, or a single parent who was the sole custodian of a child, were arrested and detained. The separation from their parents, which often lasted several years, had a profound impact on children, who were deeply traumatized and who had problems reconnecting with their parents.

115. Belarusians are not safe even when they flee abroad. The Group of Independent Experts documented a pattern of transnational repression towards Belarusians in exile, including journalists, who are perceived as opposing the Government. Among other things, authorities added individuals and civil society organizations in exile to the “extremist” list, opened criminal proceedings against them, seized their properties and froze their assets, tried them in absentia and persecuted their families in Belarus.

116. The Group of Independent Experts also finds a persistent lack of accountability for the authorities responsible for human rights violations.

117. The Group of Independent Experts urges the Belarusian authorities to stop the repression of political dissidents and to uphold the rule of law and human rights. Belarusians deserve to live in a country where they can freely express their opinions.

118. In the light of the aforementioned considerations, the Group of Independent Experts recommends that the Belarusian authorities:

- (a) Cease the arbitrary arrest and the detention of individuals on political grounds;
- (b) Immediately and unconditionally release all the detainees convicted for politically motivated reasons;
- (c) Ensure the full compliance of detention conditions with applicable international human rights standards;
- (d) Guarantee fair trial rights, as well as the rights to freedom of expression and association;
- (e) Cease the transnational repression of Belarusians in exile and all other ongoing violations of human rights identified in the present and in the previous reports of the Group of Independent Experts;
- (f) End impunity by initiating effective, independent and impartial investigations into human rights violations;
- (g) Provide full reparation to all victims of human rights violations;
- (h) Provide access to and fully cooperate with the Group of Independent Experts, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus and other accountability mechanisms.

119. The Group of Independent Experts reiterates its recommendations that States Members of the United Nations:

- (a) Ensure international refugee protection for victims and witnesses of human rights violations who have fled or were forcefully expelled from Belarus;
- (b) Initiate proceedings against alleged perpetrators of human rights violations pursuant to extraterritorial and universal jurisdiction.

Annex I

NATIONS UNIES
DROITS DE L'HOMME
HAUT-COMMISSARIAT



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

SECRETARIAT OF THE GROUP OF INDEPENDENT EXPERTS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS
SITUATION IN BELARUS
E-MAIL: gibelarus@un.org

Ref: GIEB/011

The Secretariat of Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus (GIEB) presents its compliments to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva and has the honour to refer to resolution A/HRC/RES/58/19 on the "Situation of human rights in Belarus" adopted by the Human Rights Council on 3 April 2025.

The above-mentioned resolution, inter alia, renews the mandate of the GIEB for one year under the same terms as provided for by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 55/27. The latter requests the Group of Independent Experts "to engage with the Belarusian authorities and all stakeholders...[and] to investigate and establish the facts, circumstances and root causes of all alleged human rights violations and abuses committed in Belarus since 1 May 2020, including their gender and age dimensions and their impact on victims and survivors."

In fulfilment of this mandate, the Experts and the Secretariat intend to visit the Republic of Belarus to investigate human rights violations, meet with authorities, representatives of civil society organizations and relevant stakeholders. The Secretariat is prepared to coordinate with the Permanent Mission of Belarus on the mission's practical arrangements.

Additionally, the Secretariat of the GIEB would like to reiterate its invitation to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to make submissions on relevant information or documentation related to this mandate by 30 November 2025, at the latest.

The Secretariat of the GIEB avails itself of the opportunity to renew to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva the assurances of its highest consideration.

Vienna, 27 May 2025

Handwritten signature: M-APPB



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Annex II



GROUP OF INDEPENDENT EXPERTS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BELARUS

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Ref: GIEB/017

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as experts of the Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus (the Group of Experts) pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 55/27 and 58/19.

Following up on the Note Verbale we transmitted to your Government on 27 November 2024, left unanswered to this day, and in line with our mandate “to engage with the Belarusian authorities to assist them in fulfilling their international human rights obligations”, we would like to bring to your attention information we have received concerning allegations of deaths in Belarusian detention facilities since 1 May 2020.

The Group of Experts has been collecting testimonies and material relating to deaths in custody that occurred in Belarus since 1 May 2020 and has reasonable grounds to believe that some of these deaths resulted from a failure to protect life in detention and may amount to violations of the right to life.

Specifically, we would like to bring to your attention the reported deaths in detention of the following individuals, all of whom are believed to have been arrested and detained arbitrarily for exercising their fundamental human rights in connexion to the 2020 presidential election:

1. **Vitold Ashurak (50 years old) died on 21 May 2021, while serving a five-years sentence in Shklov Penal Colony No. 17.**
2. **Mikalai Klimovich (61 years old) died on 7 May 2023, while service a one-year sentence in Vitebsk Penal Colony No. 3.**
3. **Ales Pushkin (57 years old) died on 11 July 2023, in a hospital where he was allegedly transferred from Grodno prison No. 1.**
4. **Vadzim Khrasko (50 years old) died on the night of 8-9 January 2024, while serving a three-years sentence in the Vitebsk Penal Colony.**
5. **Ihar Lednik (64 years old) died on 20 February 2024, in a hospital where he was allegedly transferred from Bobruysk Penal Colony No. 2.**
6. **Aliaksandr Kulinich (52 years old) died on 9 April 2024, in the Brest pre-trial detention centre.**
7. **Dmitry Shletgauer (22 years old) died on 11 October 2024, while serving a 12-year sentence in Mogilev Penal Colony No. 15.**
8. **Andrey Podnebenny (36 years old) died on 3 September 2025, while serving a 16 year and 8-month sentence in Mogilev Penal Colony No. 15.**



**GROUP OF INDEPENDENT EXPERTS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN
BELARUS**

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In this context, we would be grateful if you could provide information on the following matters:

1. Steps taken by the Belarusian authorities to prevent all instances of death in custody.
2. A list of persons who died in the custody of Belarus authorities since 1 May 2020.
3. Details on the steps taken to investigate the cause of death, and the outcome of investigation, of any person who died in the custody of Belarus authorities since 1 May 2020.
4. Whether the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016) is observed when investigating prison related deaths.
5. The measures taken to ensure the effectiveness, transparency, independence, and impartiality of the investigative process.
6. Information on findings of potential criminal liability in connexion to deaths in custody and whether such findings have led to prosecutions.

We would also like to remind your Excellency's Government of the international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations of deaths in detention, noting that when a State detains an individual, it is held to a heightened level of diligence in protecting that individual's rights.

In particular, we wish to refer your government to articles 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and 6 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Belarus on 12 November 1973, which guarantee everyone's right to life, personal security and not to be arbitrarily deprived of life. In addition, we wish to underline article 10 of the ICCPR, which stipulates that all persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. We also wish to refer to article 2(1) of the ICCPR that establishes a general duty to ensure the rights recognized by the ICCPR. This article has been interpreted to have established a state duty to take positive measures to protect the right to life.

When an individual dies while in State custody, there is a presumption of State responsibility. In this respect we would like to recall the conclusion of the Human Rights Committee in a custodial death case (*Dermit Barbato v. Uruguay*, communication no. 84/1981 (21/10/1982), paragraph 9.2): "While the Committee cannot arrive at a definite conclusion as to whether Hugo Dermit committed suicide, was driven to suicide or was killed by others while in custody; yet, the inescapable conclusion is that in all the circumstances the Uruguayan authorities either by act or by omission were responsible for not taking adequate measures to protect his life, as required by article 6 (1) of the Covenant."



**GROUP OF INDEPENDENT EXPERTS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN
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In addition, we would like to bring to your attention that, according to the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 45/111, prisoners should have access to health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation (principle 9). We further recall that detention conditions and treatment should always comply with international standards, particularly the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules), taking into account any personal vulnerability due to factors such as medical condition.

In order to overcome the presumption of State responsibility for a death in custody, there must be a “thorough, prompt and impartial investigation of all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions, including cases where complaints by relatives or other reliable reports suggest unnatural death in the above circumstances” (Principle 9 of the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions). This principle was reiterated by the Human Rights Council in resolution 8/3, stating that all States have “to conduct exhaustive and impartial investigations into all suspected cases of extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions”. The Council added that this includes the obligations “to identify and bring to justice those responsible, ..., to grant adequate compensation within a reasonable time to the victims or their families and to adopt all necessary measures, including legal and judicial measures, in order to bring an end to impunity and to prevent the recurrence of such executions”.

It is your Excellency’s Government’s responsibility to ensure that every death in custody is investigated and that investigations establish the cause, manner, place and time of death, as well as any pattern or practice that may have caused it. When investigating deaths in detention, the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016) must be observed. Death certificates must be completed by a forensic doctor, a copy provided to the next of kin, the cause of death and other findings explained to the family and deaths registered. The prisoner’s next of kin must be kept fully informed and proper reparations should be provided to the family.

It is therefore in line with international law that our Group of Experts urges your Excellency’s Government, if not already done, to carry out expeditious, independent and transparent inquiries into the circumstances surrounding the deaths in detention of **Vitold Ashurak, Mikalai Klimovich, Ales Pushkin, Vadzim Khrasko, Ihar Lednik, Aliaksandr Kulinich, Dmitry Shletgauer and Andrey Podnebenny**. **We would be grateful if the conclusions of such inquiries could be transmitted to the Group of Experts.**

We would be grateful to receive replies and any other submissions that the Government may wish to present, no later than 20 December 2025. This communication and any response received from your Excellency’s Government will be made public as annexes to the mandate report to be



**GROUP OF INDEPENDENT EXPERTS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN
BELARUS**

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presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2026, with the exception of any information that the Government of Belarus requests to remain confidential.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Vienna, 1 December 2025

Karina Moskalenko

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Moskalenko', is positioned to the left of the United Nations logo.



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