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ORAL STATEMENT  
Urgent Debate Belarus

UN Human Rights Council  
Forty-fifth session  
14 September – 6 October 2020

Madam President,

We welcome the Human Rights Council's holding of this Urgent Debate.

We are here because of the alarming escalation of human rights violations in recent months by the Belarusian authorities, a fast deterioration of the country's already-appalling human rights record, and the importance of preventing future violations.

On election night, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, my colleagues eye-witnessed riot police move in on a large peaceful crowd clapping hands and chanting slogans. The police threw stun grenades, shot rubber bullets, and charged at, beat, and arrested fleeing protesters.

In the weeks that followed, we witnessed unidentified masked men abduct, seemingly at random, people in the streets and drag them into unmarked vans. We have taken testimony supporting growing evidence of a campaign of widespread torture, while victims cannot seek remedy in Belarus. Meanwhile, dozens of activists have been arrested as criminal suspects under manifestly false charges.

We are also here not just because of the horror witnessed in recent months. We are also here because Belarus has for too long and without sufficient consequence refused to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on Belarus that this Council established.

And now, the situation has deteriorated and the Council must enhance its response. We urge it to establish an investigation into all human rights violations in the context of this recent crackdown, and demand accountability.

The authorities must change their approach now, and begin by releasing immediately and unconditionally Maryia Kalesnikava, and others like her who have been detained and persecuted merely for exercising their human rights. They must end abusive use of force and torture and other ill-treatment. We urge full accountability for the perpetrators of such violations. Until all this happens, this Council must remain vigilant and engaged.

Thank you, Madam President