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ORAL STATEMENT
ITEM 4: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Belarus

BELARUS: DETERIORATING HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION AHEAD OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

UN Human Rights Council
Forty-fourth session
30 June – 17 July 2020

Madam President, Amnesty International thanks the Special Rapporteur on Belarus, Ms. Anais Marin, for her rigorous work.   We urge the Council to renew her mandate and urge the Belarusian authorities to cooperate with it.   The government crackdown on human rights in the context of the upcoming presidential election is unprecedented and alarming, while other major human rights concerns persist.

Opposition presidential hopefuls and members of their teams have been arrested on trumped up criminal charges while hundreds of political activists, bloggers, journalists and peaceful protestors have been arrested, placed in detention and fined in a country-wide effort to stifle all forms of dissent. Detainees are being denied access to their lawyers and kept in deliberately harsh conditions. Politically active women face further, gendered reprisals, including threats to take their children into state custody and threats of sexual violence. We urge the authorities to respect the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression and to stop their gender-based targeting of women activists. We demand the immediate and unconditional release of Viktar Babaryka, Syarhei Tsikhanouski, their associates and all other prisoners of conscience.

While we welcome the recent Supreme Court decision to quash Viktar Skrundzik's death sentence, we deplore those handed down to young brothers, Stanislau and Illia Kostseu, in January and upheld by the Supreme Court in May. Aged only 19 and 21, they are the youngest prisoners on death row in over ten years. Their execution is imminent unless they are granted clemency. We call for an immediate moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition.

Thank you, Madam President.