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ORAL STATEMENT

Item 4: ID on the interim oral update of the High Commissioner on the situation of human rights in Belarus

IN BELARUS, HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS REMAIN WIDESPREAD AND IMPUNITY PREVAILS

UN Human Rights Council

54th session

11 September – 13 October

Mr. President,

Thank you, High Commissioner, for the update, which bleakly illustrates that human rights violations in Belarus remain widespread and impunity prevails.

Human rights organisation Viasna was instrumental in documenting and reporting widespread human rights violations in the context of widely disputed election results in 2020. Now, the founder and chair of Viasna human rights centre and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Ales Bialiatski; his colleague and vice-president of the International Federation of Human Rights, Valiantsin Stefanovich,; and Viasna's lawyer, Uladzimir Labkovich, face years in prison under politically-motivated charges.

Maryia Kalesnikava is a prominent opposition figure, musician, and symbol of the peaceful protest movement for human rights in Belarus. She is currently detained in a female penal colony, where her health has significantly deteriorated, and where she has effectively been held incommunicado for months.

They are among the Belarusians – numbering over a thousand, and growing – who remain detained, in harsh conditions, under politically-motivated charges, in many cases solely for peacefully exercising their right to protest. Yet no one has been held accountable for riot police assaults of peaceful protesters, nor for injuries sustained by those released from detention in that period, nor for the fabrication of criminal charges and unfounded prosecution and imprisonment of human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, trade unionists and other peaceful dissenting voices.

We echo the High Commissioner's call on Belarus to immediately release all those who are arbitrarily detained, and to end reprisals against free media, stop decimating civil society, and to immediately end all violations of fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

It is essential that the Human Rights Council shows leadership to facilitate a process of accountability for these violations, including by establishing an accountability mechanism, mandated to collect, preserve and analyse human rights violations, to identify those responsible, and to make recommendations on access to justice and accountability for violations. We further call on the Human Rights Council to do so.

Thank you.