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Ambassador Aleksandr MIKHNEVICH
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HTUR/JB

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Workers' rights violations in post-election Belarus

Dear Mr Ambassador,

On behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), representing 200 million workers in 163 countries, including through the national trade union centres ACV-CSC, ABVV-FGTB and ACLVB-CGSLB in Belgium and the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP) in Belarus; as well as the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ); we write to express our solidarity with the people of Belarus and to urge your government to allow the public to protest without facing arrest, harassment or violence; to allow workers to exercise their right to strike without reprisals; and to start a dialogue with the opposition with a view to re-run the elections in a fair and democratic manner.

Alexander Lukashenko – in power for 26 years - has clearly lost the support of the Belarusian people. Independent trade unions in Belarus believe that the elections were rigged. The election campaign was marked by massive and brutal repression. Excessive force was used against peaceful protesters across the country, including arrests and detention of citizens and journalists. The main opposition candidates were harassed and not allowed to compete.

Authorities announced the re-election of Lukashenko on 9 August 2020, despite clear evidence of the opposite. People took to the streets in many parts of Belarus, claiming 'electoral theft' had taken place. The same state brutality as had marked the election campaign escalated. Riot police made every effort to disperse peaceful protesters in the capital Minsk, using teargas, batons, rubber bullets, water cannons and grenades. Initially, three thousand people were detained for participating in 'unauthorised mass events' (a thousand in the capital, Minsk) including Nikolay Zimin, former president of the mining and chemical workers' union BNP and Maksim Sereda, the chairman of the Independent Trade Union of Miners (UMTO). While they were released after a few days, Nikolay Zimin was incarcerated again for 15 days and served previous days from first detention. Internet and media were blocked, and journalists were arrested and intimidated in order to stop the flow of information about the situation in the country, and to prevent public discussion and any collective response to the electoral fraud.

Major strikes have broken out and we are informed of several arrests of strike leaders, including Sergei Dylevsky, a representative of the MTZ strike committee and a member of the Coordination Committee, who has been sentenced to 10 days in prison. Even individual workers who exercised their human right to strike were arrested. Sergei Cherkasov, Vice-Chair of the BNP, arrested on 13 September was released on 28 September. He was sentenced again on 5 October for another 15 days. Anatoly Bokun, co-chairman of the strike committee of Belaruskali, was detained and sentenced to serve a 15-day administrative detention. He was dismissed from work for absenteeism without a valid reason and later received a fine of 25 basic amounts (EUR 219) only to be detained once again for 15 days. The list of workers detained for exercising their right to strike contains dozens of names and is expanding on weekly basis.

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We support the demands of independent trade unions in Belarus to stop the violence, persecution and arrests; to release all imprisoned union leaders, activists, and civil society representatives; to respect the right to strike and to start a dialogue with the opposition council, including representatives of independent trade unions, in order to re-run the election with an independent election commission and international observers.

We request you to convey our message to your capital and inform us of your Government's response.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Sharan Burrow



ITUC

Mr Marc Leemans

ACV-CSC

Mr Thierry Bodson

ABVV-FGTB

Mr Olivier Valentin



ACLVB-CGSLB
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Mr Luca Visentini



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