

Press release

Universal Periodic Review of Belarus Positive commitments but no concrete steps

Minsk - Geneva, 20 May 2010 - On the occasion of the Universal Periodic Review of Belarus, the issues of death penalty, freedom of speech, freedom of association and assembly as well as the prohibition of torture and the independence of the judiciary went under review during the interactive dialogue held at the Human Rights Council.

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), its member organisation, the Human Rights Center "Viasna" and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee welcome the acceptance by Belarus of numerous recommendations, including those related to the death penalty, freedom of speech, freedom of association and assembly as well as the prohibition of torture and the independence of the judiciary; however we deeply regret that the delegation did not make concrete commitments necessary for their implementation.

"Our organisations welcome the fact that a number of delegations raised concerns and formulated recommendations meeting those expressed by us, however we regret that a majority of speakers did not address core human rights shortcomings in Belarus" said Ales Bialiatski, FIDH vice-president and President of the Human Rights Center Viasna.

During the review, several countries underlined with concern that Belarus was the only country in Europe still exercising the capital punishment and therefore urged the government to introduce a moratorium in order to abolish it gradually. While we welcome the acceptance by Belarus of a recommendation made by Belgium to ensure that death penalty is applied only for the most serious crimes, we express our disappointment that it did not accept those related to the establishment of a moratorium and failed to provide information as requested by Switzerland and Norway on the recent executions of A.Zhuk and V. Yuzepchuk last March.

Issues related to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association were also highlighted by various countries. In this regard, we commend Belarus for accepting to guarantee freedom of association and expression for the press, political parties and human rights defenders. However we regret that it has not acknowledged the problems these actors are facing in Belarus by stating that freedom of association could be freely pursued, that the civil society was benefiting from favorable conditions of work and that the media was independent. In addition, we deplore that it has left for consideration a range of concrete recommendations that would enable the full guarantee of these rights, in particular to review its legislative framework in order to facilitate the registration of non-governmental organisations as well as the media, and to investigate cases of harassment, arbitrary detention and torture of political opponents, journalists and human rights defenders .

Similarly, while our organisations welcome Belarus' commitments to ensure fair trials and the prohibition of torture, we deplore that it has not committed to investigate cases of torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment, or to ensure that national legislation complies with international fair trial standards and that officers of security forces implicated in cases of enforced disappearance, extrajudicial executions or torture are brought to justice through impartial and credible inquiries.

Our organisations call on the government of Belarus to take immediate steps to implement the recommendations it has accepted. Our organisations will be closely monitoring this process.

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