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75011 Paris
France

International Ice Hockey Federation
President René Fasel
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CH-8027 Zürich
SWITZERLAND
E-mail to: office@iihf.com

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Open letter

Dear Mr Fasel,

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), its civil society partners and member organization in Belarus, Human Rights Center "Viasna", wish to raise to you our concerns regarding the prospects of holding the 2021 IIHF Hockey Championship in Belarus, at a time when Lukashenko is perpetrating mass repressions against his own people. Holding the Championship in Belarus would demonstrate support for, if not complicity in, the commission of serious human rights abuses that likely amount to crimes against humanity. By contrast, relocating the championship would demonstrate IIHF's integrity, respect for human dignity and its own commitments under the IIHF Code of Conduct.

Since August 9, over 33 000 individuals have been detained in Belarus, hundreds beaten, over a thousand subjected to torture, sexual violence and other inhuman treatment. At least 4 individuals were killed as a direct result of disproportionate police violence. Among those harmed by police brutality are peaceful protesters, including prominent athletes, journalists, women, minors and even pensioners. This week marks the sixth month of protests which followed Belarus' falsified presidential election, and we are confident that the protests will continue well into 2021. **Athletes, sports journalists and hockey fans could all become accidental victims of this repressive machine in case the 2021 World Ice Hockey Championship takes place in Minsk.**

It is known from reliable sources that the head of the Belarusian Ice Hockey Federation Dmitry Baskov was personally involved in a brutal attack against activist Raman Bandarenko, who later died of a brain injury in hospital. **The decision to hold the Championship in Belarus in these circumstances is a political statement condoning violence, lawlessness, and repression.**

Repressions against protesters are likely to intensify because of the Championship as it already happened on the eve of the 2014 World Ice Hockey Championship in Belarus, when dozens of representatives of civil society and opposition movements in were persecuted, arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned. **This Championship will likely serve as a trigger for further violence against protesters and crackdown against the civil society.**

The logo for FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) consists of the lowercase letters "fidh" in a white, sans-serif font, centered on a dark purple rectangular background.The logo for Viasna consists of the word "VIASNA" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered on a dark blue rectangular background.

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In addition, we further believe that the poor management of the coronavirus pandemic by the authorities is another ground not to hold the championship in Belarus. Lukashenko's regime continuously denies the seriousness of the pandemic and disregards the World Health Organization recommendations regarding social distancing and mass events cancellation. Information about security protocols and the situation in the country is scarce and inconsistent, no reliable official statistics on the number of cases exist up to date, making Belarus unable to guarantee the safe and responsible hosting of the IIHF World championship in 2021.

Hosting the IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship is an honour for any ice-hockey-loving nation; unfortunately, it also presents an opportunity for an authoritarian leader to misappropriate the sport to boost his own image and set up a smoke screen for further brutality. We believe that by allowing the 2021 World Championship to take place in Belarus, the IIHF supports and legitimizes the repressive regime. The IIHF World Championship should not take place in Belarus unless all repressions end, victims, including political prisoners, are released and receive reparations, and after the Government of Belarus has agreed to hold new and fair elections.

Yours sincerely,

Eléonore Morel
CEO, FIDH



Valiantsin Stefanovic
Vice-Chairman, Viasna

