



The Law Society  
of England and Wales

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Human Rights  
Institute

## **United Nations Human Rights Council, 49<sup>th</sup> Session**

### ***Item 4: Interactive dialogue on the OHCHR report on the situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath (HRC res. 46/20)***

17 March 2022

#### **Joint Oral Statement**

The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, Lawyers for Lawyers, The Law Society of England and Wales, and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada note their alarm about the findings of the OHCHR Examination report.

The report confirms ongoing serious human rights violations, including disproportionate use of force, arbitrary arrests and detention, and torture and ill-treatment, and concludes that there is sufficient basis to warrant further assessment of available evidence for the purposes of pursuing international criminal accountability.

As of 1 February 2022, over 1,000 prisoners have been documented and recognised as "political prisoners", with the actual number estimated close to 5,000. At least 275 civil society organisations were closed down, and 13 prominent media outlets declared as "extremist" as well<sup>1</sup>, with at least 33 journalists and media workers already detained in 2022.<sup>2</sup>

At least 36 lawyers had licenses withdrawn after representing defendants facing criminal and administrative charges, and harassment<sup>3</sup> in politically sensitive cases.<sup>4</sup> This creates a chilling effect on other legal professionals which restricts human rights defenders' and political opponents' right to access independent, effective legal representation<sup>1</sup>, perpetuating a culture of impunity.

With urgency, this Council must take all possible actions to ensure accountability for abuses and to prevent further deterioration of the situation. We urge the renewal of the mandate of the OHCHR Examination.

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/belarus/belarus-un-report-details-scale-and-patterns-human-rights-violations-committed>

<sup>2</sup> <https://baj.by/en/analytics/repressions-against-journalists-belarus-2022-chart>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/belarus>

<sup>4</sup> UN Report, PDF pg. 10/18

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<sup>i</sup> UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 16 December 1966, Article 14(3)(b), available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>.