



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 19, 2012

The United States continues to be deeply concerned about the serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus that run contrary to its OSCE commitments.

We continue to have grave concerns regarding the treatment of political prisoners in Belarus. We note that the lawyer and family of former presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov have not been allowed to visit him since at least November 8. We are also concerned that former presidential candidate Mikola Statkevich is in detention in a “closed regime” for three years as a result of a closed hearing. On January 14th, Statkevich was put in solitary confinement for 10 days for violating “internal regulations.”

We are deeply concerned about the continuing harassment and detention of independent journalists. BelSat journalist Alyaksandr Barazenska was sentenced to 11 days in jail for attempting to film a one-person protest in front of KGB headquarters on January 8. Mr. Barazenska’s lawyer was not allowed to see his client while in detention. We join the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in condemning this action. We urge the government to allow a long-awaited visit by the RFOM to Belarus.

We are concerned that new legislation could further curb the free flow of information on the Internet in Belarus. The amendment enacted on January 6 adds administrative penalties for commercial entities that violate the Presidential Decree “On Measures to Improve the Use of the National Segment of the Internet.” The provisions in this amendment, along with recent legislative amendments criminalizing foreign funding of NGOs, can only have a further chilling effect on civil society and political discourse in Belarus.

We reiterate our call on Belarus to release all political prisoners immediately, to rehabilitate them without preconditions, and to stop the harassment of members of the opposition, their families, and civil society, to include human right defenders, independent journalists, defense attorneys, and students.

On January 3, President Obama signed into law the Belarus Democracy and Human Rights Act of 2011. This Act emphasizes that individuals involved in violations of human rights, including those committed in connection with the presidential election of December 19, 2010 are subject to sanctions. We will continue to work closely with our European partners in this regard.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.