



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Continuing Situation in Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 10, 2011

The United States remains gravely concerned over the continuing post-election crackdown by the Government of Belarus on civil society, independent media, lawyers, and the political opposition. Through its ongoing detentions, trials, and harsh prison sentences, the government is creating new political prisoners. We urge the immediate and unconditional release of those detained in the crackdown, without trials and the opening of space for the free expression of political views, the development of civil society, and for citizens to expand their contact with open societies. Action against the Belarus Helsinki Commission in retaliation for its appeal to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, will only further limit that space.

The U.S. welcomes the presence today of a limited ODIHR trial monitoring mission to Minsk, and we call for its unrestricted access to the information it needs, such as trial schedules and locations. In the same vein, we hope the Government of Belarus will immediately permit the Representative for Freedom of the Media Mijatović to carry out her mission by visiting detained journalists in Belarus. This is even more important since the conviction last week of Aliaksander Atroshchankau, the Press Secretary of former presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov, and others. We once again call for an independent investigation into allegations of torture of detainees while in KGB facilities, including claims by Presidential candidate Ales Mikhalevich and Mr. Atroshchankau.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.