

Statement by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Daniel A. Russell

Solidarity with Belarus International Donors Conference

Warsaw, Poland

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I want to begin by echoing the thanks expressed by previous speakers to Foreign Minister Sikorski for organizing this timely conference. I also want to convey my appreciation for the close coordination between the European Union and the United States in responding to the aftermath of the December 19 elections. The Government of Belarus's crackdown has alarmed everyone represented here today, and this event comes at a crucial moment.

Let me briefly outline how the United States is responding to events in Belarus.

First, the United States has spoken out clearly and immediately from the night following the vote. We have repeatedly condemned the actions taken on December 19 and the continuing suppression of democratic political forces, civil society and independent media. We have called for the unconditional release of all those detained and we have done so in concert with the European Union, as Commissioner Fule noted. It is important that the international community continue to speak with one voice on Belarus, and we are committed to doing our part.

Second, given the failure of the Government of Belarus to release all those detained and to halt its crackdown, the United States on Monday took three steps:

1. Full U.S. sanctions were restored against Belarus's largest state-owned petroleum and chemical conglomerate and all of its subsidiaries.
2. A significant expansion of the list of Belarus officials subject to U.S. travel sanctions was announced and is underway.
3. A significant expansion of the list of Belarus officials subject to having their assets blocked was announced and is underway.

Taken together, these three measures target those responsible for the crackdown initiated on December 19. The United States will review and adjust its policies based on actions by the Government of Belarus.

I want to emphasize that these measures were not aimed at the Belarusian people. In fact, the United States -- joined by, I think, every government represented at this conference -- considers it essential that the international community increase support for the people of Belarus, and their efforts to build a democratic and prosperous country.

Third, and most importantly, even as we impose additional measures targeting those in the Government of Belarus responsible for the crackdown, we are simultaneously increasing our support for democratic actors. Since December 19, U.S. assistance efforts have addressed immediate needs, providing legal and humanitarian assistance to those facing repression and preserving access to independent information in order to help the Belarusian public stay fully informed.

Today, I am pleased to announce that the United States will supplement its democracy assistance to Belarus by \$4 million this year, an increase of 30 percent. This increase will be added to the existing budget, bringing total U.S.-funded democracy assistance to Belarus this year to about \$15 million. These new resources will expand support for human rights advocates, trade unions, youth and environmental groups, business associations, and think tanks. They will assist democratic political parties and movements to more effectively compete. They will support independent journalists, newspapers and electronic media operating both inside Belarus and broadcasting from its neighbors. And U.S. assistance will support the access of Belarusian students to independent higher education and expand exchange programs for business and civil society leaders.

As part of the process to develop our increased assistance plans, we are soliciting input from our Belarusian colleagues in the non-governmental sector, some of whom are with us today. As my old acquaintance Mr. Milinkevich underlined in his remarks, change in Belarus should be driven by Belarusians and, in that spirit, international assistance to support those efforts should be demand driven. The United States welcomes the contributions of other states announced today and recognizes the vital role played by American and other international non-governmental organizations in this collective effort.

We have no illusions that persuading Belarus's leaders to change course, support democracy and respect human rights and the rule of law will happen easily or quickly. As Foreign Minister Sikorski rightly recognized, this will be a marathon, not a sprint. But let me assure you that the United States will continue to target those responsible for the crackdown and will increase support for those seeking to build a democratic Belarus. And we will do this together with the countries represented at this landmark event.

Finally, I would like to close by reiterating a point made by Secretary Clinton and Baroness Ashton in their initial joint statement after the crackdown began: "The Belarusian people deserve better."

Thank you for your attention.