



Human Rights Watch
Interactive Dialogue with the HCHR on Belarus
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A year after resolution 23/15 was adopted by the Human Rights Council on Belarus, the human rights situation in Belarus has seen no improvement. The government continues to suppress virtually all forms of dissent and refuses to cooperate with the Council, including by denying access to the country for the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus and other special procedures mandate holders who have requested invitations.

Human Rights Watch visited Belarus in May 2014 and concluded that the authorities have made no progress in addressing the systemic and grave human rights issues and that certain freedoms, such as freedoms of media, speech and assembly, have further deteriorated.

Belarusian journalists who are not with state or pro-government media are routinely harassed and subjected to arbitrary detention. According to data gathered by the Belarusian Association of Journalists and shared with Human Rights Watch, since the beginning of 2014 the authorities have arbitrarily detained 15 journalists. Seven were detained in March near the Russian embassy in Minsk during a protest against Russia's annexation of Crimea. At least three were charged with "hooliganism," a misdemeanor, and courts imposed fines and up to 10 days of detention on them. Since the beginning of 2014, law enforcement officials threatened six Belarusian journalists with misdemeanor charges for working for foreign media outlets that are not registered in Belarus and initiated misdemeanor proceedings against an additional three independent journalists because of their cooperation with foreign media outlets. For example, in April, a Belarusian court imposed a substantial fine on Aliaxander Denisov, a reporter for *Belsat*, the Poland-based satellite television channel known for its critical reporting on Belarus for this misdemeanor offense.

In recent months, the authorities have harassed independent bloggers using spurious charges. In February, the prosecutor's office initiated a criminal investigation on charges of "defamation of the authorities" against Aleh Zhelnov, an independent blogger who publishes audio and video materials pertaining to unlawful actions by police. Zhelnov told Human Rights Watch that over the last year, the authorities have initiated 14 cases against him including nine misdemeanor charges, four criminal cases and one civil suit and that in the past several months police have questioned him 40 times.

Eight political prisoners – political activists and opposition leaders - remain behind bars. The Viasna Human Rights Centre, one of the country's most prominent human rights groups, told Human Rights Watch that prison authorities subject these people to arbitrary reprimands and psychological pressure. Those who have been released continue to face travel and other restrictions of their rights and are on law enforcement agencies' "watch lists," which give police grounds to question them frequently.

In 2013, Belarusian courts handed down four death sentences. Two of the sentences were executed in April and May 2014, one of which was still pending review by the UN Human Rights Committee.

According to human rights groups, the authorities continue to use “preventative custody” to stop activists from attending protests. Between April 22 and May 25 the police detained an unprecedented 45 civil society and human rights activists, and courts imposed administrative detention on those detained of up to 25 days. The arrests coincided with the traditional Minsk march to commemorate the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and the International Ice Hockey Federation World Championship, held in Minsk in May.

In this context, and given Belarus’ increasing closure to human rights scrutiny, Human Rights Watch calls on the Human Rights Council to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus to independently document abuses and monitor the implementation of recommendations put forth by the High Commissioner, the Special Rapporteur on Belarus and other UN mechanisms.