



## UN Human Rights Briefing by Liz Throssell on Belarus.

17-03-2023 | Edited NewsPress Conferences

### Shotlist

1. **Exterior shot:** Wide shot entrance of Palais des Nations
2. **Wide shot:** Briefing room
3. **SOUNDBITE (English) – Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR):** *“UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk has urged the Government of Belarus to end the systematic repression of perceived critics and immediately release all detainees held on political grounds, in the report published today that concludes gross human rights violations are being committed across the country,”*
4. Cut away: Briefing room & journalists
5. **SOUNDBITE (English) – Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR):** *“The report documents widespread and systematic violations of international human rights law, including unlawful deprivation of life and numerous cases of arbitrary deprivation of liberty, torture and ill-treatment, as well as sexual and gender-based violence, violations of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and the denial of due process and equal protection of the law,”*
6. Cut away: Briefing room & journalists
7. **SOUNDBITE (English) – Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR):** *“The High Commissioner says that our report paints an unacceptable picture of impunity and the near-total destruction of civic space and fundamental freedoms in Belarus. The Government owes it to its people to bring a halt to this mass repression and to conduct impartial and transparent investigations to ensure that those responsible for grave violations are held accountable,*

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8. Cut away: Briefing room & journalists
9. **SOUNDBITE (English) – Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR):** *“Violations appear to have been part of a campaign of violence and repression intentionally directed at those who were – or were perceived to be – opposing the Government or had expressed critical views, the report says. The report considers that some of these violations may amount to crimes against humanity,”*
10. Cut away: Briefing room & journalists
11. **SOUNDBITE (English) – Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR):** *“The beating of thousands of peaceful protesters in the immediate aftermath of disputed elections, from 9 to 14 August 2020, was approved at a high level within Government, coordinated and openly incited, the report finds. The examination also finds reasonable grounds to believe that unnecessary and disproportionate force was used against demonstrators and detainees, resulting in at least five deaths,”*
12. Cut away: Briefing room & journalists
13. **SOUNDBITE (English) – Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR):** *“Severe sentences passed by the courts are illustrative of the instrumentalization and abuse of the justice system against opposition figures, bloggers, journalists, human rights defenders, trade union activists and lawyers,”*
14. Cut away: Briefing room & journalists
15. **SOUNDBITE (English) – Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR):** *“More than a dozen legislative amendments have been passed since 2021 targeting political activists and opponents, facilitating practices such as trials in absentia, revocation of citizenship and confiscation of private property”*
16. Cut away: Briefing room & journalists
17. **SOUNDBITE (English) – Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR):** *“As of 17 March, 1,462 people held in detention in Belarus on politically motivated charges,”*
18. Cut away: Briefing room & journalists
19. **SOUNDBITE (English) – Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR):** *“The High Commissioner stresses that it is disgraceful that the Belarus authorities are determined to pursue those convicted of so-called ‘extremist activities’ and even go so far as to strip them of their citizenship. Such arbitrary deprivation of nationality will in some cases risk rendering a person stateless,”*
20. Cut away: Briefing room & journalists
21. **SOUNDBITE (English) – Liz Throssell, Spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR):** *“Now while the primary responsibility to address human rights violations remains with Belarus, the report urges UN Member States to consider working towards accountability through national proceedings based on accepted principles of extraterritorial and universal jurisdiction,”*

## Story

*“UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk has urged the Government of Belarus to end the systematic repression of perceived critics and immediately release all detainees held on political grounds, in the report published today that concludes gross human rights violations are being committed across the country,”* Throssell said.

The report details the findings of the Office’s examination of the human rights situation in Belarus, mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, and covers the period from 1 May 2020 to 31 December 2022.

*“The report documents widespread and systematic violations of international human rights law, including unlawful deprivation of life and numerous cases of arbitrary deprivation of liberty, torture and ill-treatment, as well as sexual and gender-based violence, violations of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and the denial of due process and equal protection of the law,”* she said.

*“The High Commissioner says that our report paints an unacceptable picture of impunity and the near-total destruction of civic space and fundamental freedoms in Belarus. The Government owes it to its people to bring a halt to this mass repression and to conduct impartial and transparent investigations to ensure that those responsible for grave violations are held accountable,”* the spokesperson added.

*“Violations appear to have been part of a campaign of violence and repression intentionally directed at those who were – or were perceived to be – opposing the Government or had expressed critical views, the report says. The report considers that some of these violations may amount to crimes against humanity,”* Throssell said.

*“The beating of thousands of peaceful protesters in the immediate aftermath of disputed elections, from 9 to 14 August 2020, was approved at a high level within Government, coordinated and openly incited, the report finds. The examination also finds reasonable grounds to believe that unnecessary and disproportionate force was used against demonstrators and detainees, resulting in at least five deaths,”* she said.

Given the widespread unlawful use of force, the widespread and systematic practice of torture and inhuman treatment, including denial of medical care, and the overall situation of impunity, the actual death toll during the protests and related arrests may have been higher and further investigation would be required.

The UN Human Rights Office collected dozens of first-hand accounts of torture and found hundreds of complaints to be credible. It also documented over 100 cases of sexual and gender-based violence against detainees. But the scale of sexual and gender-based violations and abuses is likely to be under-reported due to stigma, fear of reprisals and denial of access of UN Human Rights investigators to the country.

*“Severe sentences passed by the courts are illustrative of the instrumentalization and abuse of the justice system against opposition figures, bloggers, journalists, human rights defenders, trade union activists and lawyers,”* Throssell noted.

*“More than a dozen legislative amendments have been passed since 2021 targeting political activists and opponents, facilitating practices such as trials in absentia, revocation of citizenship and confiscation of private property,”* she said.

*“As of 17 March, 1,462 people held in detention in Belarus on politically motivated charges,”* said Throssell.

By February 2023, the authorities had shut down 797 NGOs, while 432 others had closed to avoid potential prosecution – figures that account for virtually all the human rights groups working in the country. Most independent Belarusian media outlets have been forced to close, with some declared “extremist”, along with, recently, the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ).

*“The High Commissioner stresses that it is disgraceful that the Belarus authorities are determined to pursue those convicted of so-called ‘extremist activities’ and even go so far as to strip them of their citizenship.”*

*Such arbitrary deprivation of nationality will in some cases risk rendering a person stateless,” the spokesperson said.*

*“Now while the primary responsibility to address human rights violations remains with Belarus, the report urges UN Member States to consider working towards accountability through national proceedings based on accepted principles of extraterritorial and universal jurisdiction,” Throssell said.*

ENDS

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