



STATEMENT
UPR Pre-session on Belarus
Geneva, 29 August 2025
Delivered by Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions

1. Presentation of the Organisation

Slide 2

This statement is delivered on behalf of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP), the national association of independent trade unions, founded in 1993 to defend and promote workers' rights.

In 2022, the Government forcibly liquidated the BKDP and its affiliates. Despite the repressions, the BKDP continues its work from exile.

Slide 3

It documents and reports violations of labour and human rights, provides international legal protection to Belarusian workers, delivers humanitarian assistance and advocates for their rights before the International Labour Organization, the United Nations, and other international mechanisms.

Slide 4

2. National Consultations for the Drafting of the National Report

The Government did not consult civil society, including BKDP, during preparation of its national UPR report. All independent trade unions were eliminated in 2022, resulting in a report that does not adequately reflect the human rights situation in Belarus, particularly regarding labour rights.

Slide 5

3. Plan of the Statement

This statement addresses the following issues:

1. Total lack of freedom of association in labour relations in the country.
2. Non-cooperation in *good faith* with the International Labour Organisation.
3. State-run system of forced labour in prisons and Medical Labour centers

Statement

Issue 1. Total lack of freedom of association in labour relations in the country.

A. Implementation from previous recommendations

There were no previous recommendations on this theme.

During the previous UPR cycle, 15 countries made recommendations to Belarus on the freedom of association in general. *Inter alia* these called on Belarus to harmonize national legislation with international standards; end arbitrary arrests and prosecutions linked to the exercise of the freedom of association; simplify registration procedures for civil society organizations; ensure protection and recognition of human rights defenders. All were “noted”, and none implemented.

B. New developments

Slide 6

The situation has worsened critically.

In 2022, the Government forcibly liquidated all independent trade unions, including the BKDP, claiming they posed a threat to national security. The cases were almost identical, filed simultaneously by the Prosecutor General. In 2023, the Supreme Court rejected supervisory complaints.

Today, BKDP operates *in exile*.

It is impossible to register an independent trade union in Belarus. Criminal responsibility for activities from the side of a non-registered organisation is up to 2 years of imprisonment.



There are criminal legal consequences for trade union activities up to 12 years of imprisonment. State-controlled Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) has replaced the independent unions. It operates under Government control and instructions.

Repressions against trade unionists and workers are ongoing.

Slide 7

Criminal persecution

More than 70 trade unionists have been criminally persecuted. Among these, some were imprisoned, some were subject to the restriction of freedom, while others had been released but not exonerated.

26 trade unionists are imprisoned.

49 trade unionists are recognised in administrative manner as “extremists”, 9 – as “terrorists”.

Searches continue at the residences of trade unionists, as well as the parents’ residences of those in exile. Criminal cases are being opened *in absentia* against trade unionists in exile.

Trade unions activities

As before, the labour legislation of Belarus excludes the effective implementation of the right to strike. From 2021, the specific grounds for dismissal due to strike participation and serving administrative arrest, which is widely applied to workers for participating in peaceful protests, subscribing to extremist materials, were added into the Labour Code.

Slide 8

Repressions on workplaces

At state-owned enterprises - the majority in Belarus - KGB officers serve as deputy directors for ideology. They monitor loyalty, enforce dismissals from “blacklists”, and prevent hiring of dissidents.

Many State-owned enterprises are not renewing labour contracts *en masse* and are laying off workers and trade unionists who:

- participated in peaceful assemblies and strikes in 2020;

- expressing opinion in connection with the falsification of Presidential elections 2020, massive violations of human rights and anti-war position.

At State-owned enterprises, coordinated actions by their management, KGB and other State enforcement agencies involve workplace interrogations and detentions.

Slide 9

C. Recommendations

1. End repression against workers and independent trade unionists; release and exonerate all political prisoners, reinstate unfairly dismissed workers and pay compensation.
2. Restore all independent trade unions (SPM, SPB, BNP, REP and their association - BKDP).
3. Amend the Law “On mass events” № 114-Z of 30 December 1997, the Decree of the President “On foreign gratuitous aid” № 3 of 25 May 2020 and other related legislation. The amendments should be directed at: end sanctions for single trade union violations; ensure lawful restrictions on mass events align with freedom of association; bring the scope of activities for which foreign gratitude aid can be used into accordance with freedom of association.

Slide 10

Issue 2. Non-cooperation in good faith with the International Labour Organisation.

A. Implementation from previous recommendations



There were no previous recommendations on this theme. It is a new development which BKDP would like to flag given a unique case of application to Belarus - the second case in the world - Art. 33 of the ILO Constitution.

B. New developments

For more than 20 years, Belarus has failed to implement the 2004 Recommendations of ILO Commission of Inquiry, issued in response to persistent violations of workers' rights, including the freedom of association.

In 2023, given repeated non-compliance of Belarus with Recommendations, ILO applied to Belarus Article 33 of its Constitution - a measure of last resort. Inter alia ILO urged the Belarusian government:

- to restore independent trade unions;
- receive an international humanitarian mission to ensure that independent doctors can visit all imprisoned trade unionists;
- receive ILO tripartite mission to gather information on the implementation of Recommendations.

A Special envoy to Belarus was appointed by the ILO in 2025. The role of a Special envoy is to engage with all relevant stakeholders, including the Belarusian government and UN agencies, to ensure the prompt and effective implementation of the recommendations.

Belarus does not cooperate with ILO in *good faith*. The Government cites as an example of freedom of association the thousands of collective agreements, which in reality have been rendered meaningless by changes to labour legislation, the absence of independent trade unions, repression in the workplace, and the crackdown on dissent. Quotes about the number of workers who are members of State-controlled trade unions are also not relevant, since such membership is compulsory at State-owned enterprises.

Slide 11

C. Recommendations

1. Engage with the ILO in *good faith* with a view to fully implement all outstanding recommendations of the ILO Commission of Inquiry, supervisory bodies and Article 33 of the ILO Constitution legal mechanism.

Slide 12

Issue 3. State-run system of forced labour in prisons and medical-labour treatment centers

A. Implementation from previous recommendations

There were no previous recommendations on this theme. It is a new development which BKDP would like to stress due to the fact that the using forced labour as a modern form of slavery not only violates *jus cogens* prohibition, but directly threatens the life and health of prisoners.

B. New developments

Forced labour in penitentiary system

All incarcerated persons are obliged to work under threat of punishment: disciplinary action, e.g. solitary confinement (SHIZO), as well as an additional criminal penalty up to 1 year of imprisonment per violation.

Therefore, the State-run system of forced labour trafficking at enterprises affiliated with the Government - woodworking, agriculture, metalworking and other State-linked sectors (e.g. OJSC



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