

Human Constanta statement

UPR Pre-session on Belarus

29 August 2025

Delivered by Tatsiana Ziniakova on behalf of [Human Constanta](#)

On behalf of Human Constanta I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this UPR review cycle.

The current assessment is crucial as it deals with a uniquely brutal period of mass political repressions in Belarus. Since 2020 – when the authorities violently cracked down on peaceful protests – human rights violations have been incessant and rampant, some of them qualified as [crimes against humanity](#) by Group of Independent Experts on Belarus, and as systematic practice of torture by the Committee Against Torture in its [inquiry report](#). The denial of human rights to dissenters is deliberate, institutionalised, and ongoing.

This unprecedented level of repression – with over a thousand political prisoners currently behind bars, and thousands having gone through political persecution in the post-2020 years¹ – is made possible by weaponizing “extremism” and “terrorism” labels.²

Despite the Human Rights Committee’s guidance in its [General Comment No. 34](#) to ICCPR to clearly define offences like “encouragement of terrorism” and “extremist activity” to ensure that they do not lead to unnecessary or disproportionate interference with freedom of expression, Belarus has developed an “ecosystem” of “anti-extremism” persecution – including specialized laws on combating “extremism” and “terrorism;” corresponding criminal and administrative offenses; 7 different [“extremist” and “terrorist” lists](#); amendments enabling the [revocation of citizenship](#) for committing “extremist crimes;” the imposition of the death penalty for [“acts of terrorism”](#) and [“high treason;”](#) and introducing [“prone to extremism” yellow badges](#) to be worn by political

¹ Not all have survived political persecution – see data collected by [Dissident.by](#) on the deaths related to political persecution – <https://dissidentby.com/en/victims>. See also Belarus: UN experts call for investigations into deaths in custody, 16 July 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/belarus-un-experts-call-investigations-deaths-custody>

² The prosecution for “extremism” often takes absurd forms – [songs](#), [books](#), [memes](#), and [anime](#) are routinely deemed as manifestations of extremism. However, the consequences are far from humorous – the cost of such elastic labels is measured in lives. [Hanna Kandratsenka](#) was arrested in May 2022 for a handful of critical comments left in Telegram channels. Charged with “insulting the president, officials and judges,” she received three years in a general-regime colony and a heavy fine. There, she was diagnosed with advanced cervical cancer, yet the authorities denied early release. She served her sentence in full, released only in June 2024. Hanna [died](#) in February 2025 a few months before her 40th birthday, leaving only her elderly mother to mourn. [Sviatlana Krutsikava](#) committed suicide by throwing herself under a train in December 2024 after being accused of “disseminating extremist materials,” charges commonly used by Belarusian authorities to repress anti-regime citizens. According to her friends, Krutsikava felt she could no longer cope with the constant searches, arrests, and psychological pressure. In May 2025, political prisoner [Valiantsin Shtermer](#), sentenced to 5 years in prison for online comments condemning Russian aggression back in 2023, [died](#) in the same penal Shklou colony, where 4 years ago another political prisoner [Vitold Ashurak](#) died in detention. These deaths are sadly just a few of those connected to the continued and cruel [political persecution](#).

prisoners.³ Since the [2020 protests](#), the Belarusian *de-facto* authorities reported at least [22.500 criminal cases](#) opened on “anti-extremism” grounds.

The effects on digital rights are particularly harsh. In today’s Belarus, a comment, a message, or a donation can be enough to destroy a life.⁴ Hundreds of people were detained and convicted for commenting on the death of a KGB officer in the infamous [Zeltser case](#) — a mass crackdown where online word alone led to multi-year prison terms, in some cases a “like” costing 1.5 years of freedom.⁵ Dozens were targeted in the [Belarusian Hajun](#) case, a monitoring project that tracked Russian troops’ movements in Belarus – after its bot was hacked and data leaked, contributors were prosecuted for “aiding extremist activity.” Online donations to Belarusian and Ukrainian independent initiatives are easily equated to [financing extremist and terrorist activities](#).

Human rights defender and dear colleague Nasta Lojka is currently serving her 7-year prison sentence under one of the most notorious “extremist” articles – Article 130 of the Criminal Code, prohibiting the “incitement of hatred.”⁶ The authorities deemed Nasta’s 2018 human rights report to be the instrument of inciting hatred against the “police officers.” Before being detained, Nasta was forced to appear in a so-called “confession video,” later spread on pro-government channels, exacerbating its humiliating effects through online circulation. Her lawyers were intimidated, disbarred, and persecuted. In prison, Nasta was put on a “terrorist list” meaning that all monetary transfers are now qualified as “terrorism financing.” She can only be contacted by her elderly mother. Despite Belarus releasing [330 political prisoners](#) through pardons and exchanges since July 2024, Nasta’s conditions were only [tightened](#) – last month she was moved to confinement in a 4-square-meter unheated bare cell. She is ordered to stay there for 6 months in total.

While an estimated 500 000 Belarusians having become forced migrants in the years of crackdown, facing a host of threats abroad (from surveillance to statelessness, now that the authorities prohibited Belarusians to exchange passports abroad),⁷ foreigners and migrants inside Belarus are an even less visible vulnerable group.

The [crisis](#) at the Belarus-EU border lingers, claiming lives of at least 120 people.⁸ There are known facts of violence against migrants by Belarusian law enforcement, as well as forced detention of

³ The politicized nature of this system has been repeatedly criticized, including by the [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus](#), the [Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus](#), the [OSCE Moscow Mechanism](#) rapporteurs, as well as the international and local NGOs.

⁴ Belarusian courts have repeatedly issued harsh sentences for making [online donations](#), leaving [online comments](#), or administering [online platforms](#).

⁵ [Aliaksandr Kurhanski](#) served 1.5 years of imprisonment under Article 130 for putting a like under a Facebook post about the incident.

⁶ Typically interpreted as incitement of hatred against “other” protected groups, such as civil servants and police officers – an approach declared unlawful by ECtHR in [Savva Terentyev v. Russia](#), (Application no. 10692/09)

⁷ Belarus: Decree Puts Exiled Citizens at Risk Bars Renewing Passports, Completing Other Transactions from Abroad, Human Rights Watch, 8 September 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/08/belarus-decree-puts-exiled-citizens-risk>

⁸ JOINT CONTRIBUTION TO OHCHR REPORT ON THE PHENOMENON OF MISSING MIGRANTS ON EASTERN EUROPEAN MIGRATORY ROUTE AT EU-BELARUS BORDER (2021-2024), “I want to help refugees” (Latvia), “Sienos grupė” (Lithuania), “Fundacja Ocalenie” (Poland) and “Human Constanta” (Belarus)

entire groups of migrants, including children, in extremely dangerous conditions at the border – in the forest, at low temperatures, without access to shelter, food, drinking water, and medical care. Belarus still lacks an effective, transparent and accessible system for providing international protection. Many are unable to even initiate the process, leaving them in prolonged legal limbo. Women migrants are growing vulnerable to human trafficking and sexual exploitation, as mentioned in para. 33 of [CEDAW's 2025 concluding observations](#) on Belarus. There is also no procedure for documenting newborn children of irregular migrants. The problem is exacerbated by a gaping shortage of organizations who could provide support to vulnerable groups as, since early 2021, Belarusian authorities [have liquidated](#) over a thousand non-profit organizations.⁹

The case of Guinean citizen Mariam Soumah is a stark example of human rights abuses faced by migrants in Belarus. After she gave birth prematurely in November 2024, the authorities initiated deportation, and barred her from seeing her newborn girl, who remained in hospital. Despite her willingness to assume parental care, the child was withheld on the condition that she pays €28,000 in medical bills. In July 2025, before custody issues were resolved, Mariam was detained for deportation without charges, legal aid, or interpretation and held in harsh conditions. In August 2025, she was deported and separated from her child, who remains under state control. The case reveals clear violations of family unity, due process, and non-discrimination under treaties to which Belarus is a party, including the CRC, ICCPR, and ICERD.

In light of the information presented, we recommend that Belarus:

- Addresses systematic shortcomings in migration procedures, including those related to international protection, ensuring that all procedures are properly implemented and migrants have equal access to them; address risk factors that directly or indirectly contribute to the disappearance of migrants and asylum-seekers, especially those arriving in Belarus in the current humanitarian crisis; **fulfil international obligations to protect the human rights of migrants.**
- **Repeal anti-extremist legislation in its current form as inconsistent with international standards and stop the practice of its arbitrary application.** Amend the Law “On the Prevention of Extremism,” the Administrative and Criminal Codes, and related laws to clearly define “extremism” in line with international human rights standards to ensure that they do not lead to unnecessary or disproportionate interference with freedom of expression, online and offline.

⁹ Among them, at least 31 focused on supporting women, protecting their rights, and promoting gender equality, including those organisations which used to provide shelters for victims of domestic violence. These actions have left women with fewer resources to defend their rights, making them even more vulnerable. It is also immensely more difficult to get qualified legal assistance – since 2020, 141 lawyers [have been deprived of their licenses](#) by the Belarusian authorities for providing legal assistance in politically motivated cases (among them – at least 52 women).