



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Parliamentary Elections and the Deteriorating Human Rights Situation in Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 29, 2024

The United States condemns the Lukashenka regime's sham parliamentary and local elections that concluded on February 25 in Belarus. Although people across the country headed to the polls to cast ballots, Belarusians had no real choice in the election. The authorities had pre-approved all candidates and liquidated all opposition parties. The elections took place amidst a tightly controlled climate of fear and repression designed to muzzle any freedom of expression, suppress peaceful assembly, and cement the Lukashenka regime's already ironclad control over society.

Since the fraudulent presidential election of 2020, Belarusian authorities have done their utmost to destroy civil society organizations, shut down independent media, eliminate political opposition, and create a culture of fear and intimidation to prevent Belarusians from speaking out. In these repressive conditions, free and fair elections are simply not possible. Hundreds of thousands of Belarusians living abroad were effectively disenfranchised, as their only option to vote was to return home, with the threat of reprisal looming over them. Fearing an impartial, transparent, and comprehensive assessment, the Lukashenka regime prevented the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) from observing the elections. But the regime could not prevent the world from seeing how completely stage-managed the entire process was, from beginning to end.

The already grim human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate, as ODIHR detailed in its February 21 statement. The regime holds more than 1,400 documented political prisoners – although the real number is likely much higher – and many of them face inhumane conditions and are held incommunicado. Ihar Lednik's death on February 20 in a Belarusian prison followed a significant deterioration in his health during his detention. He was the fifth known political prisoner to die in the custody of Belarusian authorities in only two years. We call on Belarus to release all political prisoners and end the ongoing crackdown on political dissent.

The United States stands with the people of Belarus, who deserve to have a real voice in their country's future through participating in free and fair elections. Unfortunately, the sham parliamentary and local elections we witnessed last Sunday could not and did not allow for this.

###