



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Ongoing Restrictions on Fundamental Freedoms in Belarus

As delivered by Political Counselor Christopher Robinson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 22, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We note that Belarus is hosting the World Ice Hockey Championships in Minsk and are concerned with reports that more than three dozen people have been arrested, harassed, and in some cases detained in the run up to and during the games. This is an apparent attempt by the authorities to discourage peaceful demonstrations and political activism at the hockey venues and elsewhere in Belarus. For example, authorities detained Malady Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich on April 24 and sentenced him to 25 days in jail, reportedly for unspecified parole violations. His imprisonment coincides with the Championships and has prevented him from attending an annual peaceful demonstration in commemoration of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, raising serious concerns of politically motivated and arbitrary detention. We condemn any use of detention as an instrument to prevent citizens from exercising their freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly. We urge the Belarusian authorities to stop harassing, arresting, and arbitrarily detaining individuals who seek to exercise their freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly; to release all those arbitrarily and unlawfully detained; and to drop any politically motivated charges against them.

We look forward to the day when all Belarusians will be able to exercise their rights to express their opinions and to assemble peacefully without interference, intimidation or punishment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.