

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 124

Supporting the people of Belarus and their democratic aspirations and condemning the election rigging and subsequent violent crackdowns on peaceful protesters by the illegitimate Lukashenka regime.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 15, 2021

Mr. KEATING (for himself, Ms. KAPTUR, and Mr. FITZPATRICK) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Supporting the people of Belarus and their democratic aspirations and condemning the election rigging and subsequent violent crackdowns on peaceful protesters by the illegitimate Lukashenka regime.

Whereas the Republic of Belarus held a presidential election on August 9, 2020, that was widely considered to be neither free nor fair;

Whereas official election results released by Belarusian government officials and the unofficial exit polls conducted by domestic observers and members of civil society presented substantially divergent data;

Whereas the presidential election took place without appropriate observation from local independent groups and international delegations;

Whereas, since the presidential election, Belarusians have demonstrated their strong desire and commitment to a democratic future by organizing peaceful protests in Minsk and across the country;

Whereas Belarusian civil society, led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, has called for the resignation of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, the peaceful transition of power, and the organization of new, free, and fair elections;

Whereas Belarusian opposition leaders have faced intimidation, harassment, and detention, including direct threats leading to the forced exile of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in Lithuania as well as the kidnapping and imprisonment of Maria Kalesnikava and other opposition leaders;

Whereas in the months since the election, Belarusian authorities have arbitrarily detained and brutally assaulted tens of thousands of peaceful protesters, journalists, and opposition figures, of which hundreds remain in detention;

Whereas human rights groups have documented hundreds of “harrowing accounts of torture, sexual violence, and other ill-treatment of detainees arrested for peaceful protest”;

Whereas, on August 13 and 14, 2020, relatives of detainees held in the infamous “Akrestsina” detention facility in Minsk recorded the sounds of “incessant beatings which were clearly audible in the street, and numerous voices screaming out in agony with some begging for mercy”;

Whereas thousands of Belarusians fled to neighboring countries seeking political asylum;

Whereas independent journalists and the free media have faced intimidation, violence, and mass arrests, and as a result, many journalists have been held in detention for

extended periods and faced criminal proceedings, with many foreign journalists being stripped of their accreditation;

Whereas despite efforts by the Lukashenka regime to suppress independent and free media, brave individuals, such as Ihar Losyk, Katsiaryna Barysevich, Ekaterina Andreeva, and Darya Chultsova, among others, have continued to show their resolve and commitment to accurately and honestly covering the situation on the ground;

Whereas member states of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), of which the United States and Belarus are members, invoked paragraph 12 of the 1991 Moscow Document of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the OSCE (Moscow Mechanism) to establish a mission of experts to review allegations of human rights violations;

Whereas the OSCE Rapporteur's Report under the Moscow Mechanism on Alleged Human Rights Violations related to the presidential elections of August 9, 2020, in Belarus, published November 5, 2020, concluded that there was "overwhelming evidence that the presidential elections of 9 August 2020 [had] been falsified and that massive and systematic human rights violations [had] been committed by the Belarusian security forces in response to peaceful demonstrations and protests";

Whereas women have played a leading role in peaceful demonstrations across the country, protesting the police brutality and mass detentions by wearing red and white, carrying flowers, and forming "solidarity chains";

Whereas the information technology (IT) industry in Belarus has played a prominent role in the democratic movement

by demanding an end to violent oppression, as well as creating safe platforms for demonstrators to communicate and track people who have been detained or went missing during mass detentions;

Whereas Belarusian authorities have continually disrupted internet channels in an attempt to limit communication among demonstrators and targeted lead technology companies and their employees advocating for democracy;

Whereas Belarusian state-owned television channels have played a prominent role in encouraging violence against peaceful demonstrators;

Whereas a recent survey of IT specialists found that 15 percent of IT specialists working in Belarus have already relocated to neighboring countries, and over 40 percent of IT specialists no longer want to work in Belarus, resulting in a devastating loss of talent for Belarus, possibly permanently damaging the Belarusian technology industry along with the Belarusian economy;

Whereas hundreds of former law enforcement officers in Belarus who have defected in defiance of illegal orders to commit human rights violations and cover up crimes against civilians and those who have assisted law enforcement officers in defecting have faced harassment, financial penalties, arrest, detention, and other punitive measures;

Whereas Lukashenka's regime directs law enforcement officers to use excessive force against peaceful demonstrators and sow terror in residential neighborhoods;

Whereas several peaceful demonstrators have died as a result of police violence, including 31-year-old Roman Bondarenko who was violently beaten by plainclothes police offi-

cers and, as a result, suffered head injuries that resulted in his death;

Whereas demonstrators have reported numerous instances of rape by officers while being held in detention centers and have detailed violent assaults in interrogation rooms and isolation wards that led to severe injuries;

Whereas Belarusian universities continue to expel students and dismiss educators and researchers for participating in peaceful protests;

Whereas child protective services have threatened multiple civic activists with termination of parental rights for bringing minor children to peaceful protests;

Whereas factory workers at state-owned enterprises have been continuously harassed for trying to organize independent trade unions and have been forced to sign political letters opposing sanctions by the European Union under threat of termination of their employment;

Whereas a transatlantic community of legislators has emerged in support of uplifting the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people;

Whereas international advocacy, including by co-host Latvia, succeeded in preventing the illegitimate Government of Belarus from hosting the 2021 Ice Hockey World Championship;

Whereas the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Canada have enacted sanctions and other punitive measures against several individuals and entities found responsible for the perpetration of violence against peaceful demonstrators, opposition members, workers, and journalists, among others;

Whereas Alyaksandr Lukashenka continues to undermine the sovereignty and independence of Belarus through efforts to integrate Belarus into a so-called “Union State” under the control of Russia;

Whereas the House of Representatives passed the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act of 2020 with unanimous consent, sending a clear message of overwhelming, bipartisan support for the democratic movement in Belarus;

Whereas the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act of 2020 was signed into law, expanding the President’s authority to impose sanctions related to Belarus and authorizing increased assistance to counter internet censorship and surveillance technology, support women advocating for freedom and human rights, and support political refugees fleeing the crackdown in Belarus, among other things;

Whereas the Belarus opposition, led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, organized a Day of Solidary on February 7, 2020, where countries, cities, and political and elected leaders, as well as everyday citizens, demonstrated their support for the six months of peaceful protests since the fraudulent presidential election that took place on August 9, 2020; and

Whereas the United States and its transatlantic allies and partners must continue to explore avenues for cooperation in support of the democratic movement in Belarus: Now, therefore, be it

- 1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—
- 2 (1) finds that the August 9, 2020, presidential
- 3 election in Belarus was neither free nor fair and,

1 therefore, does not recognize the government-an-
2 nounced results or Alyaksandr Lukashenka as the
3 legitimate President of Belarus;

4 (2) affirms that the people of Belarus have the
5 right to determine the future of Belarus without un-
6 welcome intervention from any outside actors in vio-
7 lation of Belarusian independence and sovereignty;

8 (3) condemns the human rights violations com-
9 mitted by Belarusian authorities, including against
10 peaceful demonstrators, civil society activists, opposi-
11 tion leaders, students, educators, factory workers,
12 medical personnel, and journalists, and calls for such
13 authorities to halt any further acts of violence
14 against civilians;

15 (4) calls for the immediate release of all those
16 detained in connection with the demonstrations or
17 others unlawfully detained for reporting on or pro-
18 testing abuses by the Belarusian government, includ-
19 ing releasing those family members of American citi-
20 zens working for United States companies;

21 (5) calls for the protection of civil society actors
22 and members of the opposition against arbitrary ar-
23 rest and violence while conducting peaceful discus-
24 sions relating to the peaceful transition of power in
25 Belarus;

1 (6) recognizes the sacrifices and bravery of the
2 Belarusian people and the incredible organization by
3 Belarusian women to peacefully demand a free and
4 fair democratic process while enduring the state-
5 sponsored violence that followed the August 9, 2020,
6 election;

7 (7) calls on Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Bela-
8 rusian authorities to engage in an open and con-
9 structive dialogue with the opposition members and
10 other stakeholders to bring about a peaceful transi-
11 tion of power;

12 (8) recognizes the Coordination Council estab-
13 lished by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as a legitimate
14 institution to participate in a dialogue on a peaceful
15 transition of power;

16 (9) calls for further targeted sanctions coordi-
17 nated between the United States, the European
18 Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, and other al-
19 lies and partners against Belarusian authorities who
20 committed human rights violations and authorities
21 from the electoral commission who engaged in activi-
22 ties that resulted in the falsification of the August
23 9, 2020, election results;

24 (10) encourages considering, in coordination
25 with transatlantic partners, the sanctioning of

1 Belarusian state-owned companies that have directly
2 violated the rights of their workers as a result of
3 their participation in or in connection to the ongoing
4 democratic movement in Belarus;

5 (11) calls on the transatlantic community to re-
6 view and consider reassessing any financial assist-
7 ance that supports the Lukashenka regime, includ-
8 ing participation in state debt issuances or procure-
9 ment contracts;

10 (12) supports increasing funds available for for-
11 eign assistance to Belarusian civil society groups as
12 well as legal assistance for activists and independent
13 journalists, among others;

14 (13) calls for an international investigation into
15 the human rights abuses committed during and after
16 the August 9, 2020, presidential election;

17 (14) calls for new free and fair elections under
18 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Eu-
19 rope observation; and

20 (15) continues to support the aspirations of the
21 people of Belarus for democracy, human rights, and
22 the rule of law, and reaffirms that the fulfillment of
23 such aspirations is the only way to ensure the con-

- 1 tinued strength of Belarusian sovereignty and terri-
- 2 torial integrity.

