



The Law Society  
of England and Wales

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada



Human Rights  
Institute



**52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council**

Interactive Dialogue on the OHCHR Report on Belarus

**Joint Oral Statement**

22 March 2023

The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, the Law Society of England and Wales, Lawyers for Lawyers and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada continue to be alarmed at the deterioration of the situation in Belarus, with ongoing widespread and systematic gross human rights violations, including torture and ill treatment, unnecessary and disproportionate use of force, and arbitrary arrests and detention. No remedy is left at the domestic level for victims to seek justice.

We condemn the lack of judicial independence and other fair trial guarantees, as well as criminal prosecution of human rights defenders. As of January 2023, about 1,500 persons in Belarus, including lawyers, human rights defenders and political opponents are arbitrarily detained. The recent politically motivated sentences against Viasna leaders, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, are emblematic of the collapse of the rule of law in the country. Belarus is fourth globally in detaining journalists and, since 2022, has repeatedly increased offences carrying the death penalty, even for less serious crimes.

Last year's OEB's Report concluded that there is sufficient basis to warrant further assessment of evidence to pursue international criminal accountability. We urge this Council to renew and enhance the accountability mechanism, by establishing an Independent Mechanism that builds on the work of the OHCHR Examination.

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