

HE Mr Sergei Aleinik
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Dear Ambassador

TUC condemns violence and repression of trade unionists and activists in Belarus

I am writing on behalf of the TUC which represents 5.5 million workers in Britain to express our concern about the situation in Belarus after the recent, flawed presidential elections.

Dictator Alexander Lukashenko – in power for 26 years - has clearly lost the support of the Belarusian people. Independent trade unions in Belarus believe that the presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya won a landslide victory in the elections and claim that the elections were rigged. The main opposition candidates were harassed and not allowed to compete. The election campaign was marked by massive and brutal repression. Excessive force was used against peaceful protesters across the country, including arrests and detention of citizens. Internet and media were blocked, and journalists were detained and intimidated in order to stop the flow of information about the situation in the country, and to prevent public discussion and any collective response to the electoral fraud. Workers who exercised their human right to suspend their work in protest were arrested.

After the election authorities announced the official electoral triumph for Alyaksandr Lukashenko on 9 August, despite clear evidence of the opposite, people took to the streets in many parts of Belarus. Protest claiming that 'electoral theft' took place throughout the country. The same state brutality as had marked the election campaign escalated. Riot police made every effort to disperse peaceful protesters in the Belarusian capital of Minsk, using teargas, batons, rubber bullets, water cannons and grenades. Three thousand people were detained for participating in 'unauthorised mass events' (a thousand in the capital, Minsk) including Nikolay Zimin, former president of the mining and chemical workers' union BNP and Maksim Sereda, the chairman of the Independent Trade Union of Miners (UMTO). Major strikes have broken out and again journalists are being arrested.

On 12 August, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, condemned the violent response of the Belarusian authorities to the peaceful demonstrations and has called for people's grievances to be heard.

The TUC supports the demands of independent trade unions in Belarus and calls on you Ambassador to convey these immediately to your government:

1. Stop the violence, persecution and arrests, and release all imprisoned union leaders, activists, and civil society representatives; and
2. Re-run the election with an independent election commission and international observers.

I look forward to receiving your response to this letter.

Yours sincerely,

FRANCES O'GRADY

General Secretary