



# AUSTRALIA



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## **United Nations Security Council: Informal Open Debate on Belarus**

**8 October 2021**

### **Statement by H.E. The Hon. Mitch Fifield, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations**

**Check against delivery**

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Your Excellency, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia,

I would like to thank Estonia for bringing this important situation to the attention of the Security Council. Its relevance to international peace and security is demonstrated by the large number of co-sponsors for today's Arria formula meeting, of which Australia is pleased to be one. I would also like to thank the briefers for their important first-hand testimony.

Australia is deeply concerned by the unprecedented escalation of human rights violations in Belarus, including the continuous infringements on the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, assembly, and association.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [A/HRC/47/49 - E - A/HRC/47/49 -Desktop \(undocs.org\)](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/47/49-E-A/HRC/47/49-Desktop).

Australia observed with dismay the mounting repression in the run-up to and aftermath of the presidential election held on 9 August 2020, which included the systematic denial of human rights and fundamental freedoms, arbitrary arrests and detention of opposition members, journalists and media workers, human rights defenders, and citizens for exercising their fundamental freedoms. Australia urges the Government of Belarus to respect the rights and legitimate democratic aspirations of its people.

More recently, we have been alarmed by reports of facilitated illegal border crossings from Belarus to neighbouring states as retaliation for firm but legitimate European policies and sanctions in the face of ongoing abuses and repression. The Belarusian authorities' crude instrumentalization of vulnerable people for political purposes magnifies the regime's worsening image abroad and its human rights record.

We call on Belarus to end violence against its citizens, to free imprisoned members of the opposition, peaceful protesters, and members of the public detained by security forces.

And we urge the Belarusian authorities to engage in a genuine, constructive, and inclusive dialogue with those representing civil society.

Australia also looks forward to the outcome of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) fact-finding investigation into events surrounding Ryanair flight FR4978.

Word Count: 299