

Senator the Hon. Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: foreign.minister@dfat.gov.au

21 August 2020

Dear Minister

I write to you on behalf of the Australian union movement to express our concern at the situation in Belarus after the recent 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, and 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 announcement that Lukashenko had won the election on 9 August, people took to the streets to protest, claiming electoral fraud had taken place. Police brutality has escalated, with riot police deploying teargas, batons, rubber bullets, water cannons and grenades against peaceful protesters in the Belarusian capital of Minsk. Three thousand people were detained for participating in 'unauthorised mass events', 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 ACTU supports the demands of independent trade unions in Belarus to stop the violence, persecution and arrests, and release all imprisoned union leaders, activists, and civil society representatives; and to re-run the election with an independent election commission and international observers. We urge the Australian Government to exert diplomatic pressure on the government of Belarus, including by the use of trade or other sanctions, to stop the repression, release the prisoners, and engage in a dialogue with the opposition in order to re-run the elections. We look forward to your response on this matter.

Yours sincerely



Michele O'Neil
President

CC:

His Excellency Graeme Meehan

Ambassador to Russia

10A/2 Podkolokolny Pereulok

Moscow 109028

info.moscow@dfat.gov.au